Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia

Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia

Edited by Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K. Mandal

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Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia

Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia is one of the first substantial comparative studies of contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia, homes to the world's largest Muslim populations. Following the collapse of New Order rule in Indonesia in 1998, this book provides an in-depth examination of anti-authoritarian forces in contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia, assessing their problems and prospects.

The authors discuss the roles played by women, public intellectuals, arts workers, industrial workers as well as environmental and Islamic activists. They explore how different forms of authoritarianism in the two countries affect the prospects of democratization, and examine the impact and legacy of the diverse social and political protests in Indonesia and Malaysia in the late 1990s.

This book responds to the impasse of the 'transition from authoritarian to democracy' paradigm by studying social agents and practices that lie beyond formal political institutions and measures of economic performance. It adopts a broader sense of politics, power and authoritarianism while challenging familiar understandings of gender, Islam, ethnicity and social classes. It will interest students and researchers of Asian Studies, Political Science, Sociology and Cultural Studies.

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1
Challenges to authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia

Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K.Mandal

This book examines the emergent challenges to authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly during the 1990s. Women, public intellectuals, arts workers, industrial workers, as well as environmental and Islamic activists, are among the various social forces examined. These groups are not undifferentiated units; neither do they exist nor operate in isolation. Each is studied in its complexity and diversity both in form and strategies of action, and in relation to others. Together, the chapters engage themselves with the discourses and practices of the social actors in question in an effort to produce theoretically informed, empirically rich, and nuanced analyses of oppositional politics. In conceptualizing political tensions at the turn of the century, this book distinguishes itself from many others on related themes by focusing on aspects of political dynamics beyond formal political institutions and expressions of authoritarianism.

A polarity between authoritarianism at one extreme and democracy at the other has been a dominant theme in various political analyses during the last half century or so. Those with specific reference to countries in Southeast Asia are no exception, whether authored by locals or foreigners. With various degrees of explicitness, authoritarianism and democracy are assumed to be categories that represent existing realities or constitute realistic concepts. Authoritarianism is assumed to be uniformly disastrous and morally repulsive and democracy universally good for all human kind. Within this dominant tradition, there is a general belief that the main tasks of analysts are to measure how far different societies in this region have been able to move away from authoritarianism towards democracy; to identify what the impeding and facilitating factors are; and to predict or explain how soon these societies can overcome their impediments and advance towards attaining full democracy.[1] While more than a few have expressed dissatisfaction with such confining polarity,[2] most preserve it with nuanced modifications. Rarely do they challenge fundamentally the entire model. Thus 'transition to democracy' has been a stubbornly persistent theme well into the twenty-first century (e.g. Johannen and Gomez 2001; Hara 2001; Frolic 2001).

This book does not privilege the authoritarianism/democracy polarity, or confine its discussion to the grey areas between the two poles. The phrase 'challenging authoritarianism' in the title is inclusive of but not reducible to social

practices that subscribe to the cause of 'democracy'. While acknowledging the values of the familiar polarity, authors in this book see it as one—but neither the only nor best—way of understanding power relations and political contestations in the societies studied. Terms such as authoritarianism and democracy are deployed without the presupposition that they are necessarily exclusive or mutually negating. In addition, it should be stressed at the outset that while this book is indebted to and critically engaged with the relevant theoretical literature, it does not aim at providing a critique of any specific theoretical position or constructing a new one. Rather, it favours nuanced empirical observations that hopefully will help re-examine familiar theories in a new light.

Authoritarianism is understood broadly here as a set of diffuse relationships both in the public and private spheres where the distribution of power is greatly unbalanced but—despite appearances—is never totally concentrated on a single person or group. Contrary to common wisdom, authoritarianism is not wholly constituted by a coercive social order designed by a small elite and forced upon suffering subjects without endorsement from the latter. In Southeast Asia for a long time but most visibly during the 1970s and 1980s, a substantial proportion of the population across nation-states appears to have helped enhance and even enjoy, social relations and a political order that outsiders conveniently disparage as 'authoritarian' in character (Stubbs 2001; Hadiz 2000b).[3] Furthermore, taking lessons from Joel Kahn (2001), one would suspect that this inclination is by no means peculiarly Asian. Under similar circumstances others might well do likewise. Like the term 'democracy', 'authoritarianism' is used here neither as a static state of being, nor a formal system of governance that operates in a clearly demarcated territory, space or institution.

It is curious that 'democracy' has managed to occupy such a hegemonic position among so many Western analysts in the last few decades, when it was considered suspect by the Western intelligentsia for a substantial period in its earlier history (Arblaster 1994:7). If democracy does not appear to have found a fertile ground in Asia, it would be a mistake, albeit a very common one, to ask what is wrong with this or that Asian country. Equally problematic is the familiar question: is Western-style liberal democracy universal and compatible with Asian cultures (e.g. Antlöv and Ngo 2000). Democracy has not been universal either as a concept or practice in the West. When the concept is imported to other social contexts it is doubly complex. Unsurprisingly, like blue jeans, McDonald's hamburgers or Hollywood movies, democracy has been met with varied responses ranging from enthusiasm to hostility. Many of these diverse responses may be equally well founded (see Emmerson 2001 for illustrations).

Much scholarly and journalistic commentary identifies a new politics and formative changes in the political cultures of Indonesia and Malaysia, espe cially following the political ferment of 1998. This literature[4] has typically relied on conventional political and social analyses that tend to privilege party politics, elites and state actors (e.g. Baker *et al.* 1999; Emmerson 1999; Budiman *et al* 1999; Liddle 2001; Schwarz and Paris 1999). Among the few exceptions are Boudreau

(1999), Stubbs (2001), Hadiz (2000b) and Törnquist (2002). It is difficult to envision the particular dynamism—not to be confused with fervour—and significance of the subjects in question through such analyses. On the whole, we hope this book will render more lucid the dynamics, politics and significance of a range of extra-parliamentary actors, including their particular limitations and struggles.

The book has three principal foci. First, it investigates the significance of the challenges to authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia. Second, each chapter examines in detail the contexts and constraints of anti-authoritarian forces, thereby giving consideration to both their problems and prospects. Third, the book offers a comparative discussion of social actors in Malaysia and Indonesia rather than the country-by-country approach taken by nearly all the existing work on the subject. Although some of the chapters mainly focus on one of the nation-states, without exception each comments on significant connections and contrasts between the two. This chapter draws the broader picture of the issues at hand and provides some necessary background information for readers who are less than familiar with Indonesia and Malaysia.

Indonesia and Malaysia: political and social contexts

Indonesia and Malaysia are next-door neighbours that have much in common. Since 1972 they have shared similar official or national languages, the variants of Malay called *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Malaysia* respectively. Islam is mandatory among Malays, the majority ethnic group to which Malaysia's dominant political elite belongs. In Indonesia, the Javanese are numerically bigger and politically more dominant than other ethnic groups—including ethnic Malays. Indonesia has the fourth largest population in the world, and Islam is the faith of around 90 per cent of the country's population; it claims the world's largest Muslim population. Muslim communities in Indonesia, however, are far more diverse and divided than their counterparts in Malaysia. This condition is due in part to the syncretic inclinations of vernacular animism, Hinduism and Buddhism that prevail on Java, Bali, and other islands.

Some of the important differences between Indonesia and Malaysia have their origins in the transition from colonial rule to independence (in 1945 and 1957 respectively) when contrasting forms of authoritarianism were instituted in each country.[5] A variety of politically active groups emerged in strength soon after the Second World War throughout the Southeast Asian region. Left wing political movements and politics made much headway to be halted by the beginning of the 'Cold War and the rise of US-sponsored anti-Communism and anti-neutralism' (Hewison and Rodan 1996:53). In the British colony of Malaya, the war against the Communist Party became an opportunity for the colonial power to eliminate left wing political culture as a whole. Independent oppositional politics of all kinds was crushed between 1948 and 1960, the period the British termed 'the Emergency'. As the Communist movement was smashed before the creation of

Malaysia, Benedict Anderson argues that the country 'inherited (and later improved on) the colonial regime's draconian anti-subversion laws and steely bureaucracy, but not the insurrection itself (Anderson 1998). As such, he observes that Malaysia has had a 'permanent authoritarian government', a condition that has 'everything to do with a collective determination on the part of the Malay ethnic group (52 per cent) to monopolize real political power in the face of the large Chinese (35 per cent) and the smaller (10 per cent) Indian minorities'. Sheila Nair offers further analysis that renders the complexity of the inter-ethnic compact and its importance in the ruling elite's claims to legitimacy (Nair 1999:91–3).

After gaining independence, Malaysia has been gradually transformed from an exporter of agricultural products to an industrializing country, its authoritarianism sustained mostly through legal measures. Since 1981, the country has assumed an increasingly high profile in the international community under the leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the multi-party ruling coalition, the National Front *(Barisan Nasional),* led by him. UMNO (United Malays National Organization), the mainly ethnic Malay party, is the dominant partner in this coalition. As President of UMNO, Mahathir is understood to be the Prime Minister of the country as well. In 1993, he appointed his protégé Anwar Ibrahim as the Deputy Prime Minister, a post held by the latter until 1998.

Indonesia's experience with communism differed from Malaysia in decisive ways. Unlike in Malaysia, the Indonesian Communist Party participated freely in electoral politics after independence. The Party was nevertheless held in suspicion by the military, particularly as the former transformed itself into one of the four leading contestants in the 1955 general elections. Unlike its counterpart in Malaysia which survived into the early 1990s in the jungles on the northern border with Thailand, it was eliminated under the aegis of Cold War politics after nearly two decades of independence and by violent military means that left a lasting mark on the country.

In the middle of the 1960s, segments of the military leaning to the ideological right came to political prominence in direct confrontation with the Indonesian Communist Party, the largest in the world outside China and the Soviet Union. In 1966, these officers helped accelerate the removal of the first President Sukarno, with tacit assistance from the major powers of the Western bloc. Sukarno, an anti-Western autocrat and champion of the Non-Aligned Movement, campaigned against the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. Five years after independence, Malaysia was to be reconstituted with the inclusion of three former British colonies: Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah.[6] Sukarno opposed the move aggressively as he saw it as a project of Western neo-colonial interests. Unsupportive of his efforts to undermine Malaysia, the Indonesian army pursued its own agenda. The army took control of the government in 1966 following one of the bloodiest massacres in modern history; around one million suspected communists and their sympathizers were killed (see Heryanto 1999c). Following the establishment in 1967 of the New Order, for 32 years formal political and military power was highly centralized in the hands of one person, Retired General

Suharto. An ethnic Javanese who was inclined towards patrimonialism and developmentalism, the second President was a master of the political manoeuvre.

Under Suharto, Indonesia was transformed into a haven for foreign investors and domestic capitalist cronies. While the rule of law and the judiciary in Malaysia enjoyed a good reputation until the late 1980s, Indonesia's industrialization took place with little or no commitment to building good and accountable governance, respect for the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the protection of civil life. As a number of the following chapters show, the contrasts in governance have led to a relatively higher degree of confidence in the state among a variety of Malaysian social actors than among their Indonesian counterparts (see especially Chapters 3, 4 and 6). Fear, violence and corruption prevailed in Indonesia in tandem with the official rhetoric of social harmony, consensus, religious virtues, and familial values. Although Indonesia saw regular elections under Suharto, the governing regulations and implementation of the elections undermined the principles they stood for: people's sovereignty and political accountability.

Besides the political and legal histories of the two countries, the politics of ethnicity, particularly in relation to the variety of Chinese communities, deserves some elaboration in the present discussion. Colonialism changed the historical, social and cultural relationships of the diverse and dispersed Chinese communities with the people of the region. In Malaysia under the British, poor Chinese migrated in substantial numbers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries specifically to fill a variety of roles in the colonial economy. Today, Chinese Malaysians constitute less than one third of the total population of over 20 million, some of them hold a crucial role in the nation's economy. On the whole, ethnic Chinese communities are a strong non-majority political constituency.

Contemporary Malaysian political and institutional life is markedly divided by ethnicity, more so than Indonesia. Colonial rule created the social and economic conditions for the numbers of Chinese to swell in urban centres while confining Malays largely to the rural areas. In the interest of social and economic equality, the Malaysian government implemented the New Economic Policy (NEP; 1971–90), an affirmative action measure designed to promote the participation of the *Bumiputera* or 'indigenous' population (mainly ethnic Malay but in legal terms not exclusively so) in the modern sectors of the nation-state. While the NEP may be credited with advancing the interests of a broad cross-section of society, it also sowed divisions as it became the instrument of the racialization practised by the country's ruling coalition (Mandal forthcoming).

As in Malaysia, the Chinese population in Indonesia increased substantially under colonial rule, and they were funnelled into particular sectors of the economy under the Dutch. Today, the business elite of the ethnic Chinese enjoy important positions within the national economy, and share with other Indonesian elites some degree of cronyism and collusion. Unlike the situation in Malaysia, however, Chinese Indonesians, constituting less than 3 per cent of the population of nearly 230 million, had no political representation under the New Order, while their cultural identities were declared undesirable. Chinese schools, languages, writings

and cultural practices were banned. Citizens of Chinese descent were required to carry and present documentation beyond the ordinary to obtain public services. Quotas were imposed on members of this ethnic group for entry into certain professions and educational institutions. Although similar quotas have been in place in Malaysia, they were implemented in New Order Indonesia without the same political controls as its neighbour.

The social and political histories of Indonesia and Malaysia indicate differences in the use of repressive powers in the two states. The New Order rose on the basis of political violence and maintained its militarist rule by dealing with political opposition in a brutal manner. The Malaysian state's repression on the other hand has been largely exercised through national security laws inherited from the British. There was a time, especially before 1990, when Malaysia was perceived as a more orderly state than their own country by Indonesians while the reverse is true of Malaysians. In this connection the 'regularized' character of authoritarianism in Malaysia is further examined in Kelly's chapter. He discusses an instance of political containment by law in the April 1998 amendment to the Companies Act. As a result, bureaucrats were provided with greater power to refuse the registration of organizations or close them down.

The Internal Security Act (ISA) is a more illuminating example of Malaysia's regularized authoritarianism, indeed one that was being considered by Suharto for implementation in Indonesia.[7] The Act is noted in several of the following chapters, especially in Budianta's discussion (Chapter 6) of the humanitarian protests against it by Malaysian women. The ISA legalizes methods that amount to orderly options to the 'disappearances' or 'mysterious killings' that were brutally carried out by the New Order (see Bourchier 1990). It vests the state with the lawful power to detain anyone without trial. This post-colonial refinement of colonial laws has been used during several intra-elite political crises in order to control dissenting intellectuals, artists, activists, and opposition party members. One of the most wide-scale recent implementations of the Act occurred in 1987 when 106 people were detained without trial. *Operasi Lallang* as it was called is noted in a number of the chapters as a key turning point whose impact, though unequal to the repressive violence of the militarist New Order, was significant within the Malaysian context. In Chapter 5 Othman characterizes the state's dependence on the Act to repress freedom of expression as its 'ISA mentality'.

Reformasi politics

Similar to situations in South Korea and Thailand after 1997, Indonesia's economic crisis rapidly developed into political and moral crises of the incumbent leadership, followed by a change in government. The extraparliamentary protests that date back to the early 1990s gained momentum and became more forceful in demanding the end of the New Order, the longest-lasting authoritarian regime of the capitalist Western bloc. President Suharto eventually stepped down (some argue that he only stepped aside) on 21 May 1998. The term *Reformasi,* 'reform',

became the most salient catchword for the largely unorganized millions of Indonesians who demanded a change in government and a reversal of the deteriorating social conditions, One dominant formulation of the evils of the day was KKN, the abbreviation for *Korupsi, Kolusi, Nepotisme* (Corruption, Collusion, Nepotism).

It should be noted at the outset that *Reformasi* has meant different things to different people. In Chapter 2 Heryanto speculates that the term may have its origins in the diplomatic talks between New Order officials and the IMF and World Bank respectively. At this time, the term referred to Suharto's compliance with the conditions of the donor agencies' bail-out package that included an end to corruption, collusion and nepotism, a more radical meaning than typically intended by the word *Reformasi* When the media accorded primacy to it, oppositional actors (including those who preferred *Revolusi* to *Reformasi*) found it difficult to avoid its use. The term was first introduced to Malaysians by Anwar Ibrahim's political camp around the middle of 1998—when political turmoil was near its peak in Indonesia—in reference to calls for greater transparency in government. In response, Mahathir attacked Anwar and his supporters later in the year. In both countries then, *Reformasi* was the rallying cry of those who took to the streets as well as many others, including the political and business elite. Budianta suggests in Chapter 6 that the term is useful not as an analytical framework but as a name for the 'political, economic and social responses to a multidimensional crisis that provided an outlet for previously repressed and widespread demands for structural change'. Hers is a good working definition for the diversity of forms and substance in *Reformasi* activism. The very open-endedness of the term has been the source of its success, allowing disparate oppositional groups to find in it something that spoke to their cause and thereby galvanize their forces (Noor 1999).

In a series of fast-moving events that were not imaginable only a few years earlier, both the Indonesian catch phrases *'Reformasi'* and *'KKN'* spread across the Straits of Melaka and became the rallying cry of thousands of Malaysians, mainly but not exclusively in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, who demanded an end to the long-standing leadership of Mahathir. Standing at the forefront of these masses—largely unorganized and morally outraged citizens as in Indonesia—was Anwar Ibrahim. Ironically, Anwar had been until then the Prime Minister's heir apparent.

There are many other similarities, connections and contrasts between the ways events unfolded in Indonesia and Malaysia. For instance, the dramatic removal of Suharto in May 1998 inevitably influenced the calls for Mahathir's resignation soon after he sacked Anwar. Transformed into a martyr, the latter became a unifying icon and politically capable leader for the unorganized and angry masses. Alongside the politically charged cries of *'Reformasi'* and *'KKN',* spectacular images and dramatic narratives of militant and heroically audacious student activists in violent confrontations with security forces were imported to Malaysia. Likewise, the orchestrated anti-Chinese violence (some of the worst in many

decades) in Jakarta, Solo, and several other towns in Indonesia had a great impact on the imagination of Malaysians. Chinese Malaysians were forced to contemplate the fearful implications for Malaysia of the racialized atrocities in neighbouring Indonesia (see Heryanto 1999a) that mobilized women activists (Chapter 6) and led to the solidarity work in the arts community (Chapter 7).

Needless to say, the traffic in images, narratives, gossip, direct references, subtle allusions and illusions in this Internet era was a lot more complex. Individuals and groups took and mistook different elements of events in different ways for a wide variety of reasons. However, it is worth exploring a few instances of 'othering' that provide insights into the relationships that have been imagined and developed between Indonesians and Malaysians in recent years.

Othering

Post-structuralist and post-colonial writings have helped popularize the concept of 'Others' and its derivative 'othering' in contemporary social sciences and the humanities. A survey of the varied ways the terms have been deployed is neither possible not necessary here. Suffice it to note how the concept can be relevant to our discussion at hand. Othering, as used here, refers to a communicative act, where a third party (real or perceived) is discursively constructed as a convenient foil for the collective 'Self' of the speaking subjects. In such acts of othering, the referents are usually silenced, excluded, or absent. The existence of Others is recognized and taken seriously, but their identity is remoulded, mainly though not always consciously to facilitate the assertion of the identity and interest of the Self as the privileged, centred, or normalized subject(s). While it is obvious that the term 'othering' carries negative overtones, it remains debatable whether or not all discursive practices are guilty of some degree of othering.[8]

Unsurprisingly, othering has come to prominence in selected Asian countries since the so-called 'economic boom' of the 1980s, in tandem with the invention and propaganda of 'Asian values'. As Pinches observes, 'othering' in Asian countries constructs not only the particular imagined 'West' but fellow Asians as well. He notes that 'officials, national elites and rising middle classes have used heightened levels and overtly nationalist forms of consumption as national status claims *vis-à-vis* other countries and peoples in the region' (Pinches 1999:31). This observation works nicely in the case of Malaysia and Indonesia where the shaping of mutual perceptions has played significant roles in domestic and regional politics.

Indonesians have been influenced by a romantic othering in the area of managing ethnic tension and political and economic equity. In Indonesia, there have been ideological nativists who look up to Malaysia's NEP as the necessary and desirable correction to Indonesia's economic discrepancies for which the economic power of 'Chinese businessmen' is often blamed. According to this view, the government of Indonesia should impose further restrictions on ethnic Chinese participation in the nation's economy. Unsurprisingly, such a view finds enthusiasts among the newly emerging and more independent business class of

pribumi ('native') ethnic groups who claim to have suffered from the New Order's cronyism and racial discrimination. At the same time, some Chinese Indonesians claim Malaysia sets a good example by guaranteeing the ethnic minorities rightful civil rights and political representation in state institutions, often overlooking the context—the racially hierarchical party politics for instance—and the distinctive historical conditions that enabled the NEP's implementation in Malaysia.

More than a few Malay Malaysians consider Chinese Indonesians more desirable, because they appear to be more considerate and patriotic, a condition attributed to successful assimilation. Indeed, in the eyes of many Malaysians, Chinese Indonesians—especially the youth who grew up under the New Order—look, speak, and behave almost indistinguishably from the so-called *pribumi* population. Their counterparts in Malaysia, on the other hand, preserve selected Chinese cultural practices and traditions, though in localized forms. Malaysians who find the character of Chinese Indonesian identity attractive nevertheless fail to observe the coercive measures and censorship that made the 'assimilation' in Indonesia possible.

'Chineseness' became a significant point of contention on the side of the anti-authoritarian forces. On the one hand, Malaysian *Reformasi* activists regretted that their fellow citizens of Chinese descent were not as politically active as those in Indonesia in challenging authoritarianism in the streets. However, as we have touched on already, these activists' perceptions of Indonesia were not necessarily grounded in social and political realities. Ethnicity was not the sole decisive factor in determining the participation or level of involvement of citizens in the *Reformasi* movements of either Indonesia or Malaysia. Opposition publications in Malaysia mythologized the struggle in Indonesia precisely in ways that Heryanto argues against in the next chapter. Hence such optimistic prognoses were made as the prediction that UMNO would fall just like the Suharto political machinery (*Harakah* 1999).

On the other hand, supporters of Mahathir depicted the anti-Chinese violence from Indonesia as a threat to the success of the Malaysian state in maintaining social and political order. Images and reports were reproduced in the mass media that tended to intimidate the general public by hinting at the chaos the *Reformasi* movement would lead to in Malaysia if Malaysians followed the example of Indonesians by taking to the streets. In the months preceding the 1999 general elections, for instance, government-controlled television stations ran 'multi-lingual and slickly produced long-form advertisements contrasting Malaysia's stable government and social conditions with riots, deaths and property destruction in neighbouring Indonesia' (Wong 2000:129). Narratives such as this served to draw a contrast between barbaric Indonesian 'rioters' and the implied civilized character of Malay Malaysians (namely the ruling party UMNO), aimed particularly at the Chinese segments of the population.

Contrary to the political conservatism of the ASEAN compact, as exemplified by its shared credo of non-interference in member states' affairs, politics crossed borders and became regionalized. This intensified at the height of the euphoria

surrounding *Reformasi* in 1998–9. News of Indonesian support for Anwar reached Malaysians through the wire services, the opposition mass media and the Internet. Adnan Buyung Nasution, the influential Jakarta lawyer and friend of Anwar, criticized Mahathir in the international press, and acted as an observer at his friend's trial (AFP 1999). A photograph was circulated by an international news agency of demonstrators at the Malaysian embassy in Jakarta with a large banner carrying this message: 'Mahathir=Soeharto' (*The Straits Times* 1998). An Indonesian publisher of Islam-oriented work released in Jakarta a translation of Anwar's book *Asian Renaissance* a few months after his arrest, including in it a statement by the author after he was ousted from his post (Anwar 1998). Politics became regionalized even further when Anwar stalwarts, hounded by Malaysian security personnel, sought exile in Jakarta where they began to organize a political comeback (Lopez 1998).

All in all, the political elite in Malaysia may have been genuinely scared by the stories that they themselves encouraged and circulated concerning Indonesia. There was much fear in the ruling elite that 'Indonesian riots' would visit them when thousands of people marched through the streets of Kuala Lumpur on 20 September 1998 upon responding to the call by Anwar for a peaceful demonstration. The country had not seen protests by such large numbers since the student demonstrations that took place at the end of 1974, nearly a quarter of a century earlier. The absence of mass demonstrations for so long may have been reason enough for the government to be very concerned. According to the reports of top officials, however, what the government most feared was a repeat in Kuala Lumpur of the so-called 'Jakarta riots' of May and June of 1998 (for more see Heryanto 1999a). The Inspector General of Police at the time, Rahim Noor, observes as follows, implying a causal link it seems between the two cities: 'Uppermost in our minds was not to allow the riots in Jakarta to spill over to KL at all costs and a repeat of the riots and lootings which happened in Jakarta' (Koshy 1999).

The veracity or accuracy of the admission by the head of the police force is not as significant as the degree to which the othering of Indonesia was engendered by the mass media allied to the government as well as opposed to it. The consequences of the othering, however, were not necessarily predictable or in keeping with the aims of either the government or oppositional groups. For instance, even as the pro-government media attempted to instil a fear of Indonesia as the 'other', this effort nevertheless advanced the possibility of imagining a transnational space.[9] Consequently, an avenue was opened for individuals and social groups themselves to make sense of the connections and contrasts between the political upheavals in the two countries. As the chapters of this book reveal, the street protests of 1998 in Malaysia, indeed the *Reformasi* movement as whole, were linked in various ways and at different levels to developments in Indonesia.

Studying Indonesia-Malaysia

Despite the compelling and long-standing connections, similarities, and illuminating contrasts between Indonesia and Malaysia as cursorily outlined above, there has been remarkably limited interest in them in the general public discussion of the two countries and among scholarly observers. Comparative scholarship on the two countries has been embarrassingly rare and usually falls under the more general rubric of Southeast Asian studies. Indeed, when the work towards this book was initially conceptualized in 1997, before the 'economic crisis' which proved to be a historical watershed, it was not easy to advance a rationale for a comparative study of Indonesia and Malaysia, Once the project got off the ground in the latter part of 1997, the series of dramatic incidents then unfolding in the two countries—and unexpected by many—made it seem as if scholarship of this sort had always been necessary.

Just as this book project was initiated, a study on a closely related theme was published, namely Syed Farid Alatas' *Democracy and Authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia* (Alatas 1997). Alatas makes the important, fair and accurate claim that 'there has not been any comparative work done on the state in Malaysia and Indonesia' (Alatas 1997:150). In addressing the lacuna, Alatas' work deserves attention. His approach is, however, quite different in kind and style from that pursued in this book. Highlighting these differences helps elucidate what this book attempts to achieve and why.

Alatas' book is evidently a product of serious research and analysis. Within the terms it sets, it is a solid piece of scholarly work. It covers much ground and offers many insights and important information. Unfortunately, history has been unkind to this book. In less than a year of its publication, the societies it discusses changed radically, thus undermining its primary arguments. Essentially, the book is a comparative study of the causal historical factors that have made Malaysia a 'democratic' state and Indonesia an 'authoritarian' one (1997:2), Alatas argues that three causal factors have been responsible for the formation of these two different regime types, namely (a) the existence (in Indonesia) or absence (in Malaysia) of armed struggle against the state; (b) the internal strength of the state (in Malaysia, and the lack thereof in Indonesia); and (c) the high degree of cohesion (in Malaysia) or division (in Indonesia) of the elite.

Alatas provides a review of the literature, discusses the various definitions of what constitutes 'democratic' states, and delineates them in very formalistic terms that reflect conventional social and political analyses (Alatas 1997:1). These terms include the existence of fair and competitive elections, independent political parties, civil society, and the separation of powers. Despite some qualifications and admitted problems in designating Malaysia as a democracy, Alatas (1997:5) maintains that one should not think that 'democracy is merely façade' in Malaysia.

One can take issue with the conceptualization of 'democracy' and other key categories that Alatas adopts, as well as the extent to which Malaysia and Indonesia fit into the dichotomous categories of democracy and authoritarianism

respectively. His main arguments about the three causal factors that determine the character of a state along the democratic-authoritarian axis are well presented but open to debate. Importantly, a critique or disagreement at a conceptual and abstract level may not be necessary. The weakness of his arguments becomes clear when we consider changes in Malaysia and Indonesia merely a few months following the book's publication in 1997, and more so after 1998. Indeed one fundamental reservation that we have about Alatas' work is its generalized, and consequently reductionist, portrayal of the two countries compared, glossing over their respective internal contradictions and histories. Even if we accept for a moment the view that Malaysia was once democratic and Indonesia authoritarian for historical reasons that Alatas offers, one wonders why the same historical factors have generated very different political environments, and in some areas political reversals, in both countries since 1998.

In several important areas in Indonesia, important reversals followed the end of Suharto's three decades of authoritarianism, rendering the familiar 'authoritarian-versus-democracy' categories more problematic. One of a few obvious examples includes the general elections of 1999, the first accountable effort to elect a new parliament since the 1955 elections. New electoral laws were enforced, allowing forty-eight political parties to compete instead of the officially-sanctioned three, as in the previous twenty-five years of the New Order. For the first time various independent and volunteer groups from different walks of life across the nation took part in unified efforts at monitoring the process and ensuring the maximum possible degree of fair ness and accountability (more in Chapter 2). To the surprise and relief of many, the elections were completed with a remarkably minimal degree of violence in comparison with previous state-controlled elections in the New Order era.

The role and dignity of the armed forces has plunged to a degree unimaginable a few years earlier (see Bourchier 1999 for details). Due to the absence of a majority vote and single party dominance in the new government, the military and the New Order's political party Golkar could not be totally liquidated. The military still enjoys reserved seats in parliament, but their number was reduced to thirty-eight from seventy-five. Public demands for a total removal of this privilege continue to be heard well into 2002. With the loss of power and prestige in East Timor, and subsequent threats of legal inquiries and prosecution for past crimes and human rights violations, demoralization was rampant among the soldiers. To make things worse, street protesters often inflicted abuse and violence against passing military officers and their properties (vans, buildings and equipment) during the volatile years of 1998–2000.

During the same period in rural areas hundreds of kilometres away from the capital city, telecommunications networks and political tussles within the nation's elite, there have been regular reports of outrage unleashed against village chiefs or local parliaments in a style and scale unseen in many decades (see e.g. Cohen 1999). Private businesses and professional as well as civic associations mushroomed during the first two euphoric years of post-Suharto Indonesia. The

government dissolved the Department of Information that functioned for more than three decades as the New Order's machinery for propaganda and censorship. The number of licensed print media increased to 1,687 in the year 2000 from around 289 prior to 1998 (Heryanto and Adi 2002). Only several hundred of them actually survived for more than one year. Many of the newly published media organs became either the mouthpieces of new political parties and civic groups, or retailers of gossip, superstitious pronouncements, and sensationalist materials purveying violence and sex.

The above account is meant only to introduce new developments and highlight core issues in the contemporary analyses of the two countries. The best, if implicit, lesson we can draw from Alatas' book is presented by himself in the penultimate sentence of his concluding chapter: 'Democratization in Indonesia and Malaysia must always be in a state of flux and uncertainty' (Alatas 1997:164). Put differently, a study of social change in these countries, as elsewhere, including so-called 'democratization' must recognize the messiness of the reality under investigation. Such study requires flexibility and a dialectics of a scale greater than often allowed in the familiar orthodoxy of positivist political science and sociology. Diagrams, tables, conceptual definitions, taxonomic categories, and jargon—all respectable and often desirable—in many scientifically inclined approaches to the study of power and social relationships are often more satisfying in the enhancement of established academic empires, and theorization in the disciplines, than to the development of a critical intellectual practice (see also Chapter 6).

The next section proceeds to a critical reflection of our own endeavours and predicament. Alatas concluded his pioneering work on this note: 'But, if rapid development increases the stakes for the government, it also strengthens the resolve of extra-bureaucratic forces to press on for democratic reforms' (Alatas 1997:164). He ends where we begin.

Towards post-authoritarian societies

In contrast to Alatas' focus on the so-called 'state', and the formal typology of regime types along the 'authoritarianism' versus 'democracy' divide, all contributors to this book focus their research on the complex and often contradictory features of non-statist agencies, structures, practices and histories. The agencies in focus include urban-based professionals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and labour activists, religious communities and leadership, and women's groups, as well as socially engaged artists. The central questions that all the ensuing chapters ask concern the constitution and history of these agencies, the dynamics of their assets and liabilities, and their structural relationships with those outside their immediate circles.

Questions of the state do not totally disappear in the picture, but they occupy less than central positions. Underlying the decision to pursue these core questions is the fundamental conviction and working framework that power and political

relationships do not reside, accumulate, or concentrate only within formal state institutions or their officials. In other words, our endeavour does not avoid the political in order to resort to ostensibly apolitical areas of inquiry or alternative academic disciplines such as cultural anthropology and psychology. Rather, we try to be as broad-minded as possible in accounting for the field and the workings of power relations.

Understood broadly, authoritarianism, just like democracy, is not a state of being or 'system' that operates in a clearly demarcated territory, space or institution. Authoritarianism is understood here as a set of diffuse relationships both in the public and private spheres, where power is never totally concentrated on a single person or group—as it may occasionally appear— and without legal or moral accountability to the public. By no means is this either uniquely Asian or an exceptionalism. While the phenomenon may have broader validity, it is particularly relevant in studies of post-colonial societies, Indonesia and Malaysia included, where the modern nation-state is fairly novel and unevenly institutionalized across the body politic.

Consequently, our research has yielded a series of in-depth, nuanced, and polyphonic narratives of specific areas and issues rather than a consistent breadth of inter-regional comparative analyses. In contrast to familiar political and politico-economic analyses where democracy, development and authoritarianism are most rigorously discussed, and where they acquire some of their dogmatic senses, the current study seeks to investigate more qualitative and less tangible dimensions of social phenomena. Instead of working with the given definitions and decidedly taxonomic boxes of 'authoritarianism' and 'democracy', or seeking alternatives between the two as well as desirable modifiers and designators (like 'soft authoritarianism' or 'semi-democracy'), the chapters that follow assess and comment on the qualities of authoritarian subjecthood, social relations, practices and structures, as well as those of its democratic counterparts in today's Malaysia and Indonesia. These are things that are constantly, as Alatas puts it, in 'a state of flux and uncertainty' (Alatas 1997:164).

This book does not offer a single answer to a single question. It asks several but highly inter-related questions about the conditions of, possibility for, and observable practices of challenging authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia in the late 1990s. It considers these questions from several angles and recognizes the contrasts and connections between them. The questions raised in this book do not come straightforwardly from the dominant discourses of social change in the established social sciences and humanities in the West. While all contributors in this collection are trained in the West, and continue to be engaged with global intellectual exchanges, nearly all spent their formative years within the contexts of the social transformations they analyse. Nearly all have had several years of direct and active involvement with the organizations and activities they describe in their chapters.

For these reasons this book is rare among its kind. The central questions it raises and the answers it attempts to offer do not descend directly from the exogenous

logic and imperatives of academic production from outside the societies it studies. Chapters in this book arise from years of personal practical engagements, grounded analytical reflection, serious doubts, and a series of intellectual dialogues with Western-based social sciences and humanities. It is an inductive venture with a commitment to an open exploration that is full of uncertainties. While each chapter makes the painful but necessary compromises of analysis and reporting to be able to communicate effectively with some focus, each rejects easy reductionism or succumbing to the high abstraction characteristic of hegemonic global academic practices,

In keeping with the scholarly directions described above, Mary Louise Pratt offers an illuminating critique of Western theory. She argues against its tendency to generalize as this can reduce heterogeneity. Good theory is conventionally 'understood as the ability to explain a maximum range of cases with a minimum number of axioms' (Pratt 1998:430). In place of this kind of theorizing, she offers the approach of scholars studying new social movements in Latin America who 'have been challenged to conceive of social formations as constituted by (rather than in spite of) heterogeneity and to reconceive social bonding as constituted by (rather than in spite of) difference' (Pratt 1998:431). In the course of her argument, she relates this alternative theoretical perspective to the very diversification of academic knowledge itself.

Pratt suggests that the single most important task facing scholars is expanding and deepening the idea of democracy when 'neoliberal discourse has forcibly emptied it of meaning, until the mere presence of elections remains its lone defining characteristic' (Pratt 1998:434). The perspective advanced here is echoed by Budianta in her chapter in this book when she articulates—citing Chantal Mouffe—democracy as a subversive discourse, and again by Mandal in the claims made by working class social actors to the arts as an egalitarian social space. These and other chapters in the book problematize democracy as a social process in pluralist and heterogeneous terms through the study of a variety of social actors within particular historical and social contexts.

Beyond the authoritarianism/democracy axis

As stated earlier, most comparative observations of Indonesia and Malaysia take the form of partial and passing statements in works devoted to Southeast Asia as a whole, or in collections of essays devoted to specific countries in the region. The best work on the subject to date remains the seminal study by Harold Crouch (1985).[10] It is a structuralist analysis of the relationship between economic development and political structure after Barrington Moore (1966) that establishes the classical model for most studies of development and democracy in 'Third World', 'developing', 'post-colonial', or 'South' countries.[11] More recent works of similar or related perspectives, including the rare collection of essays co-edited by Hewison *et al.* (1993), have been critically and insightfully reviewed by Jacques Bertrand (1998). Like the pioneering book by Alatas (1997), Bertrand's essay falls

victim to the historic transformations that have been taking place in Indonesia and Malaysia since 1998, rendering it outdated too quickly.

From the perspective of this book, what is missing from many conventional politico-economic analyses is a consideration of the complex and dynamic workings of power beyond formal institutions—especially the state apparatus. Most of these studies are centred on the political elite and formal institutions. Of late, attempts have been made with varying levels of success to move away from the state and formal political institutions in order to examine the disparate pockets of challenges to authoritarianism in Asia. These include Garry Rodan's mostly pessimistic edited collection (1996) and three more optimistic works, namely Anders Uhlin on democratization in Indonesia (1997), Robert Hefner (2000), and Krishna Sen and David Hill (2000). More immediately relevant and intellectually challenging is Vincent Boudreau's post-*Reformasi* analysis of Indonesian democratization (1999), where the latter is compared rather disparagingly with the people's power movement in the Philippines which ended President Ferdinand Marcos' authoritarian rule in February 1986.

With few exceptions such as Boudreau (1999), societies in many of these usually politico-economic analyses are portrayed as building blocks that are reducible to a few definitions and conceptual frameworks. These societies are dissected as if they must and will undergo a more or less unilineal trajectory from underdevelopment to development, from tradition to modernity, from feudalism to capitalism, from authoritarianism to democracy. Such analyses differ in assessing the levels of failure or success of these societies to democratize and the possible reasons, leading the analysts to suggest a variety of typologies. Democracy is almost always assumed to be fundamentally unproblematic in principle. It is also assumed to be achieved once and for all in the West without any serious problems, and it is the best possible ideal for the rest of human history. Empirical details and quantitative data are often constructed in abundance in an objectivist style, as dictated by the chosen theoretical framework, and presented in order to defend abstract arguments that are far-reaching in claims but too narrow to accommodate the complexities of the phenomena they purport to describe. An example of such comparative works on democratization in the countries under study is Neher and Marlay (1995).

In several of these studies, one finds sophistication. However, not infrequently it is the sophistication of conceptual abstractions and analyses that resonates in mathematics, engineering, or chemistry—as if social entities and relations are comparable to figures or chemical substances, accompanied by reductionism and simplifications of social aspects that are considered given, unproblematic, or insignificant from the chosen theoretical position.[12] One target of such reductionism and simplification is 'culture' while another is social 'identity'. To name but one poor outcome of such reductionism, we need only consider the scant reflection informing the use of such terms as 'race' in reigning perspectives on Malaysia. Typically, party political and socially-based notions of 'race' are taken

as unproblematic reflections of social and cultural realities in the country (Mandal forthcoming).

Apparently these problems are not the failure of individual scholars, but indicative of something more systematic. The 'regnant' paradigm in studies of Southeast Asia has been largely resistant to change (McVey 1995) and mostly focused on contributing to the success of modernization and nation-building. In addition, we must also take into account the early and important observation of the American political scientist Donald Emmerson (1984), who argued that Southeast Asia is an externally constructed political entity that came to prominence only around the Second World War (alongside the heavy presence of the United States' military as well as the prolific production of analyses by North American political scientists). Academic studies from this formative period largely take the nation-state and international relations as their main units of analyses. Anthropological studies that have had a longer engagement with the region, and have been more sensitive to the more vernacular, localized, intra-and cross-national boundaries, were marginalized.

Our task is definitely not simply to bring back anthropological studies of the past as Emmerson (1984) suggests, because 'culture' as understood and practised in the regnant anthropological perspectives has been equally problematic (see Kahn 1993:6–21). To put it crudely, formal categories such as 'economy', 'politics' and 'culture' have too often been reified to represent discrete social relations. So often, when culture is inserted into such political analysis, it is conceived to be a static, often essentialist, form or substance that belongs exclusively to one definable community. In other words, this is a conception of culture that does not exist in most contemporary works where culture is central and problematized (for instance in contemporary cultural studies, post-structuralism, and studies of the media and identity politics, to name a few).

Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd emphasize culture as a site that offers political possibilities 'when a cultural formation comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to refunction it for exploitation or domination' (Lowe and Lloyd 1997:1). These authors posit the notion of the 'social' as a terrain where the political, cultural and economic relate to each other. Such insight helps frame the efforts in the chapters that follow to articulate the political 'productivity' of non-traditional actors and actions. Both the Malaysian and Indonesian states have articulated an official culture where economics, politics and culture have come to be regarded as strictly separate domains. Many of the challenges to authoritarianism analyzed in this book arise from the intersection of these ostensibly separate domains, significantly in the conjuncture of the cultural and the political. It is precisely this point of intersection that has mobilized some scholars of Latin America 'to draw attention to how social movements operate at the *interface* of culture and politics' (Alvarez *et al.* 1998:xi). Further, these scholars 'contest the often-made claim that the "political"significance of social movements has receded with the return of formal, electoral democracy to much of Latin America'. In keeping with Lowe and Lloyd, they articulate 'how the

"cultural"struggles of social movements over meanings and representations are deeply entangled with their struggles for rights and economic and political-institutional power'.

In any case, the uses of culture in voluminous works under the rubric of development studies and modernization, and more recently Asian miracles', have accentuated the so-called 'culturalist approach' to political change (e.g. Vatikiotis 1996; Antlöv and Ngo 2000). This approach, in turn, becomes too easy a target for those more inclined towards positivism (e.g. Alatas 1997: 20–1). Meanwhile, 'culture' and 'power' as developed in 'cultural studies' appear to have minimal dialogues, if any, with scholars of democratization and authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia. This book attempts to make a contribution to fill this gap. [13]

Partly in reaction to Samuel Huntington's controversial thesis of the 'third wave of democratization' (1991), many students of democratization in the 1990s strongly reject any temptations to assume any simple correlation between economic growth and democratization. Similarly, they reject the notion that the decline of an authoritarian regime will necessarily lead to durable democratization. Despite this general tendency, studies of democratization in Southeast Asia to date appear to fall short of the theoretical rigour and comparative perspectives of their counterparts in Latin America and post-Communist Eastern Europe. Unlike the majority of works on Southeast Asia that operate within the bipolar framework of authoritarianism versus democracy and are preoccupied with types of regimes, major studies on Latin America probe the more subtle and challenging questions about the conditions and qualities of the processes toward consolidated democracy (see Martz 1997).

This book was prepared with a broad view that questions of social change generally and more specifically in Southeast Asia should not be reduced to arguments about the types of authoritarianism or democratization. Neither should we concentrate on the purely programmatic and predictive question of how authoritarian trends and dispositions in Indonesia and Malaysia give way to more democratic structures, agencies and practices. Such questions are indisputably important and worth pursuing. Nevertheless, the admittedly dormant stage of critical studies of political change in Indonesia and Malaysia suggests others. We believe there are many other and equally important questions about social agents and practices in predominantly authoritarian circumstances that lie beyond the confines of formal political institutions and economic performance.

The foregoing suggests that two different major areas of enquiry demand more serious attention. The first is a critical re-examination of the already hegemonic concept of 'democratization'. The other is a broader and more in-depth ethnography of political agencies, practices and institutions beyond the historical dominance of studies of 'transition from authoritarianism to democracy'. Rodan warns of the danger 'that new forms of political organization and reconstitutions of state-society relations which do not correspond with the liberal democratic model will escape adequate identification and analysis' (Rodan 1996:5).

Rendering the effectiveness, innovativeness and subtleties of the social actors in question thus requires attention to nuanced discourses and practices to register their political value. This book attempts a few exploratory steps in this direction.

The chapters

The next six chapters share a number of perspectives. Challenges and responses to authoritarianism are presented in their variety. State and capital form both the object and partial sites of resistance by democratic struggles, thus rendering inevitable contradictions and predicaments. All the chapters discuss particular social forces whose work is nonetheless nearly always in conjunction with a broad range of individuals and groups. These chapters also show that authoritarianism need not end with the removal of the autocrat in power—Suharto in this instance—just as it may not be solely attributed to the same. Authoritarianism persists in a variety of ways despite the greater mobility that is evident in certain areas such as the increased freedom of expression in Indonesia after 1998. Several forms of liberalization emerge as common phenomena following the fall of authoritarian regimes, but they do not in themselves necessarily lead to the formation of long-lasting democratization. The chapters consider in some depth how middle class intellectuals, non-governmental actors, workers, Islamic activists, women and arts workers respond to transitional political moments, and how they find themselves entangled and disentangled with profound challenges, old and new. A brief description of each helps in assessing the overall argument of the book.

In the following chapter, Heryanto shows that the middle classes need not necessarily be dismissed—as many scholars believe—as oppositional social actors. Given certain historical conditions, in this instance shaped by the early stages of a rapid and large-scale expansion of industrialization, elements of Indonesia's middle classes can and have played important roles in the democratization of politics and society. However, as Heryanto emphasizes, not all their actions and values are inherent to the class; these are not only the result of the selflessness and virtuosity by which journalists and academics have been mythologized but the consequence of historical experiences. The key point made in his chapter applies to the rest: industrialization under the authoritarian governments of Indonesia and Malaysia has brought about distinct historical conditions whose constraints and possibilities must be assessed anew in any examination of social actors.

Kelly's study of industrial zones peripheral to the national capitals shows how much the history, social institutions and cultural orientations of an industrializing locality shape the kind of civil society that is formed. Kelly compares NGOs in two rather radically different contexts in terms of infrastructural development, social composition, historical influences and interconnectedness with the world—Penang in Malaysia and Batam in Indonesia. Yet both these geographical peripheries to the capital have been areas of rapid industrial growth, attracted a youthful work force from around the country, grown largely from foreign

investment, and importantly, gained economically as a result of state intervention in facilitating the entry of global capital. However, the kind of authoritarian state intervention in each case has been quite different. Kelly describes Penang as administered by a bureaucratic authoritarianism with some localization of political power. Batam on the other hand had been until the late 1990s under the centralized and militaristic authoritarianism of the New Order. Kelly argues that there is little uniformity in civil society formation as a consequence of industrialization. He extrapolates from here that there is not necessarily a common sense to the conceptualization of civil society as well as its relationship to 'democracy' or 'development' in this regard.

As Kelly observes for NGOs, Vedi R.Hadiz sees the trajectory of workers' activism in no simple or predictable manner. Hadiz argues that the exclusion from political life of labour—by employing militaristic force in Indonesia and by institutional means in Malaysia—has made it difficult for workers to form a cohesive and independent counterweight to the state in these countries. As a result, he concludes that workers have not been well positioned to shape 'the agenda of the reform movement dominated by political actors organically unconnected to the labour movement'. Importantly, his argument rests not on the exclusionary practice of authoritarianism in one country alone but on the globalization process. Although globalization's consequences have been contradictory, multi-national corporations have been able to press for restrictions on workers' organizational activities. Yet, transnational labour solidarities have been slow in the making. Hadiz notes for instance the absence of efforts by Malaysian trade unionists to defend the rights of Indonesian migrant workers. In the past, unofficial organizing vehicles without clear structures were advantageous in dealing with state repression, but Hadiz feels that it is unclear if these can develop into effective institutions in the post-Suharto era. He concludes by emphasizing the need for workers to develop 'the capacity for self-organization' in order to influence society, politics and the economy.

Locating her analysis within complex political and structural constraints, Norani Othman argues that the democratization of Islamic politics and society has been at the forefront of the agenda of Muslim activists in Malaysia and Indonesia, in keeping with post-colonial trends in Islamic countries worldwide. Her argument is sensitive to the global currents in the politics of Islam that both states have been forced to recognize and to which they have had to respond. Islamization in this regard is part of a complex process of social change and not the adoption of an ideological orientation alone. Othman argues that the response of the state to the complex phenomenon of Islamization has been short-sighted. Specifically, Mahathir invited Anwar to join the ruling cabinet to appease Islamic organizational interests and initiated a number of policies that led to the Islamization of laws and social practices. Given elite-led efforts to shape the Islamization process, the democratization of Islamic politics and society appear to lie in the same hands. While she believes that the *Reformasi* years have brought to the forefront Islamic notions on democratic alternatives, it is unclear to her if

this development will shape the existing Islamic movements in the region in a substantive and long-lasting manner.

In contrast with Othman's Malaysia, Budianta sees women social actors in Indonesia contributing vital challenges to the existing gendered character of social relations as well as its divisive ethnic and religious tendencies. She argues that efforts by women activists to broaden the social and class basis of participation in political life—defined in novel and generous terms, has consequences far more meaningful than the emergence of women leaders such as Megawati Sukarnoputri in elite politics. While the rise in women's activism during the *Reformasi* period may have been plagued by problems of organizational cohesion, the democratization of politics was advanced in significant ways. Budianta's focus is on the less structured women's organizations that mobilized across different social strata with increased vigour in response to the regional economic crisis and in challenging authoritarianism. Individuals and groups of women both in Malaysia and Indonesia were moved to act as a result of humanitarian concern following the deleterious effects of the economic crisis as well as the long-standing state violence, especially as it impinged on the bodies of women. Her work thus reconfigures the political, and shows how women from different strata became politicized in meaningful ways by such means as 'milk politics', when initially they had been fearful or sceptical of women's activist groups and 'politics'. Given this context, Budianta sees women's activism as not feminist alone but as democratic movements in themselves, hence her preference for the syncretic term 'feminist democratic' activism.

Mandal takes a broad-based approach in articulating the shape and substance of the engagements of activist arts workers. He makes the claim that activist arts workers cross many social boundaries—including class, religion, ethnicity, and gender—and have been collectively, though not necessarily cooperatively, producing significant aesthetic engagements with authoritarianism. Skilled in the modulation of symbols, they work with other social actors in addressing the inequities and repression under authoritarianism. To evaluate arts workers by some measure of 'direct' oppositional productivity would be a mistake. Activist art practices are shown through selected cases to be significant in developing critical perspectives from below in engaging authoritarianism. More immediate to the *Reformasi* movements, arts practices were critical in the lead up, crisis, transition, and aftermath of political change through such actions as the repossession of public space—a symbolic act of significance discussed in the chapter.

On the whole, the chapters support the idea that social analyses need to be broad based, self-critical, sensitive to practices, and capable of representing difference in order to be relevant. Reflecting the textured and differentiated social and political sphere, the chapters of the book intersect and interrogate each other with the hope that as a whole they provide a perspective on the dynamics and prospects of the challenges to authoritarianism that have taken place and are emerging. In different ways, these chapters also explore some of the fundamental limits that such prospects will have to confront in the long term.

Notes

1 One respected scholar writes: 'Indonesia is still a far cry from genuine democracy, …But yet somewhere deep inside I am optimistic, especially since most people that I talk to in Indonesia see the opportunities…the future of democracy in Indonesia depends more upon how attractive and effective a new, more participatory, democracy can be made to the people—especially the elite—and less on the prevalence of certain "Asian"values' (Antlöv 2000:221).

2 For a review, see a series of articles under the theme 'Debating the Transition Paradigm' in *Journal of Democracy,* 13 (2), July 2002.

3 For a slightly different, but comparable, situation in Burma see Alamgir (1997); and for China and Taiwan see Shi (2000).

4 By no means is this meant to be a survey of the literature. A few references are made only for illustrative purposes. Even then, only those published after the eventful year of 1998 and directly relevant to the issues under discussion are considered.

5 For a broader but brief history of Indonesia from about 5,000 years ago to the post-Suharto period, see Cribb (1999). For a more comprehensive history of Indonesia, see Ricklefs (1981). For Malaysia's history, see Crouch (1996) and Milne and Mauzy (1999).

6 Malaysia as it is known today was constituted only in 1965 with the inclusion of the states of Sabah and Sarawak and the exclusion of Singapore.

7 Under President Suharto, the New Order state periodically used the Anti-Subversion Law and 'Defamation' penal codes to detain and prosecute opposition figures (see Heryanto 1993a). What distinguishes the use of this Law from Malaysia's ISA is the general absence of an attempt by New Order officials to present their cases with legal credibility. Notwithstanding this difference of style, the effects of such state repression in the two countries may not be that different, namely inculcating widespread fear among the population. In response to the popular resentment towards the Anti-Subversion Law, New Order officials contemplated revising it and crafting something similar to the ISA of Malaysia (and Singapore). In 1999, partly in an attempt to consolidate his power and legitimacy, President Habibie scrapped the Anti-Subversion Law. However, to the dismay of many *Reformasi*-minded Indonesians, in the same year a new set of laws was proposed, that gave considerable power to the military and President to suppress internal and external threats in matters affecting 'state security'.

8 For an illuminating discussion of this, see R. Young (1990:1–20). 'There has to be some "other"—no master without a slave, no economic-political power without exploitation, no dominant class without cattle under the yoke, no "Frenchmen"without wogs, no Nazis without Jews…' (Cixous, cited in R. Young 1990:2–3).

9 At least two highly innovative and original articles have explored problems of identity politics as mediated by the globalized Internet in response to the 1998 violence in Indonesia, see Lochore (2000) and Tay (2000).

10 As this book went to press, the news about the publication of Case (2002) came to our attention, but there was insufficient time to consider its relevance here.

11 According to such a perspective, social, economic and political change in the last one or two hundred years follows 'the reaction of [the] land-holding elites to the

prospects of agrarian commercialization' (Crouch 1985:3) and industrialization. For more, see Moore (1966).

12 Of course, most writings and academic genres are guilty of similar symbolic violence. The difference, however, lies in the degree of explicit admission and selfreflexivity incorporated in these activities.

13 Scholars of Thai democratization have engaged in more dialogues with postmodernism, see for instance Tejapira (1996) and Callahan (1998).

2
Public intellectuals, media and democratization
Cultural politics of the middle classes in Indonesia

Ariel Heryanto

The phenomenal growth of the so-called urban middle classes in many Asian societies, following the sustained capitalist industrialization of the last quarter of the twentieth century, has been well documented. Beyond that general observation, however, we have a sea of unresolved debates about the new phenomenon, including the precise nature of the so-called middle classes, ways of studying them, and their qualitative significance to 'democratization' (itself no less popular and no less problematic). Cognizant of the complexity of the subject matter, this chapter focuses on a fairly narrow topic and scope. The bulk of it is devoted to two empirical cases where middle class politics, in particular economic and socio-cultural settings in industrializing Indonesia, made a significant contribution to the development of broad challenges to the New Order authoritarian regime (1966–98). Comparisons with the situation of neighbouring Malaysia will be offered from time to time to sharpen the issues.

Two main arguments will frame the ensuing discussion. Firstly, under certain circumstances middle class public intellectuals in post-colonies can take the most active role in the process of democratization, though by no means are they consistently or universally important agents of history. The specific circumstances for this active role can be described as social instability in the post-colony during the early stages of a sustained and expansive capitalist industrialization. These changes are significant in that they undermine the familiar ways of doing things, but they are not extensive and powerful enough to establish a new social order. Some features of capitalist industrial production and consumption are dominant, but they do not occupy a hegemonic position in moral, cultural or ideological spheres. It is neither possible nor necessary to characterize the political traits and ideological orientation of the middle classes in a static, sweeping, monolithic or deterministic formulation. Various segments within the middle classes, with diverse and changing attitudes, respond differently to the plural processes of democratization (Koo 1991:486, 495, 499) that are also inherently contradictory (Goldfarb 1998:6–8).

Secondly, in view of the arguments above, it is worthwhile examining in detail the dynamics of middle class cultural politics at a micro level, without losing sight of the greater (national and global) structures that enable and impose certain limits on the possibilities of this social dynamics. This chapter will not present the big

picture of the capitalist industrializations of Indonesia and Malaysia, or show how they affect the lives of people under discussion. Such a broad picture has been well documented by others,[1] and will remain in the background of the two events in Indonesia to be discussed below. The ensuing discussion will focus on structures and agents at a micro level in order to offer the argument that a democratic transition in post-colonies is effective when democratization-friendly consciousness, ideas, practices and institutions have already found fertile ground in various forms, including in offices, schools, families, or social organizations. As Wright notes, some of the most systematic theories on social classes, such as those developed by Marxists, have been built upon 'highly abstract macro-structural concept[s]' (Wright 1989:275–6). There is a need to examine the dialectics between 'the ways in which macro-structural contexts constrain micro-level processes, and the ways in which the micro-level choices and strategies of individuals can effect macro-structural arrangements' (Wright 1989:276).

The question of the middle classes

The problematic terms 'middle classes' and 'intellectuals' are interchangeable in the public discourse of the societies under discussion. This and the following sections will be devoted to discussing some of the problems with these terms and understanding why in Indonesia and Malaysia these problems are often misrecognized and the terms interchangeable.

Opposing but equally problematic views have been dominant in the studies of middle classes in Southeast Asia. Some hold the view that the middle classes in these societies are or should be morally superior and necessarily progressive. Others dismiss them as essentially conservative and hopelessly opportunistic. A detailed review of the Indonesian and Malaysian middle classes is proper here, but beyond the urgency of the present chapter.[2] For the case at hand it is necessary to mention certain common drawbacks in the discussions of the Indonesian middle classes.

First, there has been a strong assumption that the middle classes constitute objective and empirical entities that exist independently of the theoretical constructions of the observers (Crouch 1985; Mackie 1990; Robison 1986). Quantitative measurements of their size, their wealth and properties, levels of education, or their mobility give some appearance of their tangible existence. Sometimes empirical descriptions of their lifestyles are presented in great detail (Dick 1985; Oetomo 1989). While such figures and descriptions make interesting reading, they contribute little to understanding the nature of the middle classes. At worst, they mislead us by equating particular individuals, groups, social institutions, activities, or lifestyles, brands of consumer goods, and cultural tastes with qualities of middle class-ness in an essentialist and ahistorical manner. Like other classes, middle classes are in the final analysis an arguable conceptual construct, referring to a non-tangible entity: an element of a social structure.

Other commentators, tired of the difficulty of reaching a minimally agreed definition of the middle classes, decide to throw out the whole concept, or to declare that no 'genuine' middle classes exist in Indonesia. Anti-communism, which swept the region during the Cold War, has been responsible for the poverty of class analyses in Indonesian and Malaysian studies today. In part the situation is also the result of the dominance of empiricism with a heavy dose of the social sciences developed in the USA in the post-war years.

The second set of major drawbacks in the literature on Indonesian middle classes derives from the fact that until quite recently there has been a widely accepted but problematic notion of 'middle class' in the singular. The works of Erik Olin Wright (1987, 1989) and others (e.g. Abercrombie and Urry 1983) helped scholars to recognize the importance of recognizing the concept in the plural: middle classes. This is not only a matter of numbers, size or variation. Middle classes consist not only of different but also contradictory elements. There can be progressive middle classes as well as very conservative, opportunistic or apathetic ones in the same nation-state for various reasons that are historically specific. To further complicate matters, each segment of these classes may give different political responses at different moments in the complex dynamics of democratization. Democratization can be as plural as the middle classes (Koo 1991:486).

The pluralist notion of contradictory middle classes is especially helpful for discussions on Indonesia and Malaysia, where an industrial capitalism that has polarized classes into sharper relief has also been complicated by other social divisions on the basis of ethnic and religious differences, that in turn have erupted in protracted conflicts in several islands in Indonesia since the late 1990s (see Bertrand 2001). Understandably, the significance of the multiple identities is closely examined in all the chapters of this book. In contrast to the overly romantic popular myths about the selfless, truth-seeking and democratically-inclined middle classes in public discourses, scholarly discussions (especially among foreign specialists) on the Indonesian middle classes have been predominantly discouraging or disparaging. However, this has not always been presented in a disapproving manner.[3] This dominant view has been commonly shared by a wide range of scholars who may strongly disagree with each other on other issues. At one extreme is William Liddle, the anti-Marxian and American liberal-pluralist political scientist who admired the achievements of Suharto's militarist New Order, and believed as did the regime that the middle classes were quite happy to support it (see Liddle 1990). At the other extreme is Richard Robison, Australian political-economist and one of the first scholars to attempt a Marxian analysis of the New Order's capitalist industrialization. Until recently (Robison 1996:84–8), he has been very dismissive in his assessments of the political orientation of the Indonesian middle classes (Robison 1986,1990).

At least three problematic reasons are commonly presented to dismiss the significance of middle class politics. Some argue that the middle classes are too small in number to be able to affect any major social change (as if world history suggests that social changes hinge on numerical difference). They also point out

that the Indonesian middle classes are too dependent on state patronage, opportunistic and selfish (as if historical changes have always been led by virtuous heroes, and other social classes, including Western middle classes, are selfless). In addition, they note that Indonesia's industrialization does not mimic Europe's experience (as if it should). Finally, equating or comparing contemporary Asian middle classes with the emergent bourgeoisie of Europe in the early period of industrialization, some observers declare the Indonesian middle classes to be politically hopeless because the business class under the New Order was predominantly of Chinese descent and therefore pariah. Largely uninterested in or uninformed of cultural politics, these observers disregard the politics of student movements and public intellectuals who constitute a numerically insignificant group.

In what follows, my reference to middle classes is consciously responsive to the dominant views outlined above. While admitting that no term such as 'middle classes' can possibly represent a tangible, clearly-bounded and unchanging entity, I contend that the use of the term is provisionally defensible. It is both a popular term that has significance in the societies under study and a useful social scientific construct, derived (however imperfectly) from empirically observable practices and embodiments of social structures. The concept accommodates plural identities and practices, some more progressive than others, that change and oscillate with time, as shown in Chapters 6 and 7. What all variants of the middle classes share in common (without which they cannot be designated as middle classes at all) are their orientation towards any combination of these: urban residence; modern occupations and education; and cultural tastes, which manifest most vividly, but not exclusively, in consumer lifestyles. Economically, these people occupy positions distinct from those that roughly fit the general conception of the working classes, as well as those who extract the greatest advantage in the existing social order by virtue of their enormous economic or bureaucratic power.[4] While the economic dimension is important, as Joel Kahn (1996b) insightfully reminds us, it is insufficient as the sole measure of the qualities of the middle classes, especially its more politically active elements.[5]

The majority of journalists, university students and lecturers, artists, lawyers, non-governmental organization (NGO) activists and many others in contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia have been frequently identified as middle classes. The reference to the temporal and spatial specificities is crucial as we do not want to relate class positions in an ahistorical and abstract manner. The same social groups have also become the central, if not near monopolistic, referents of the term 'intellectuals' for reasons that I will discuss further in the next section. Economically, post-colonial journalists and academics may occupy a set of positions not very different from other salaried professionals, including mid-ranking state officials and mid-ranking military officers. Culturally and politically, however, there is an important difference between the two groups of middle classes. Journalists, academics or artists work mainly in the production of authorized symbols (words and images). They are expected or assumed to work

with some degree of autonomy, innovation, integrity, creativity and occasionally subversion. Because of these expectations, they distinguish themselves (and are distinguished by others) from military officers, state officials or professionals in commerce, for whom other qualities are more commonly expected or claimed.

Thus, the notion of 'middle classes' in this chapter is more than an economic category. This chapter focuses on specific segments within the middle classes who dominate the production of intellectual and cultural works, and dominate the position of being public 'intellectuals'. Both 'middle classes' and 'intellectuals' in the ensuing discussion are better understood as discursive, ideological and mythical concepts, rather than being purely empirical descriptions of some biologically existing individuals with specific names, professions, consumption patterns or institutional affiliations. The next section will elaborate on the economic as well as cultural elements of this ideological construct. Different social classes are in a way comparable to the names of colours, Colours exist in the real world and in the minds of their observers, but their differences are not as clear-cut as what their observers see and name. Like other important concepts, the term middle classes is both the product and producer of the various social identities, institutions and practices that they purport to describe.

Post-colonial public intellectuals

In contrast to many Western scholars' dismissal of the Indonesian or Malaysian middle classes, for better or worse most societies outside the bourgeois-hegemonic and liberal-democratic societies of the capitalist 'West' tend to accord considerable moral authority to middle class 'intellectuals'. Indonesia and Malaysia are no exception. The basis of these intellectuals' authority varies from the religious and artistic to the secular scientific domains. In contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia some of them are involved in journalism, academia, the arts or religious leadership.

Admittedly, the above is a broad generalization. Respect for and myths about high intellectualism in the capitalist industrialized West vary significantly, with France at one extreme where intellectuals enjoy a relatively high stature for their elitist abstract philosophy. In Britain and the USA on the other hand the populist intellectualism is more prominent (Goldfarb 1998: 8). Likewise there seems to be a stronger myth of and a stronger pressure for intellectual activism in contemporary Indonesia than Malaysia—as noted also in Chapter 5—for reasons that need not detain us here.[6] The degree of state officials' suspicion of intellectuals and the intellectuals' (self-)respect varies among Asian countries, capitalist and socialist alike. Even within a single nation-state, the status of intellectuals is never static. Not all academics, lawyers, artists or journalists have gained equal public recognition as 'intellectuals' because of their different 'performances'. Notwithstanding these variations, it is useful to make the broad generalization above for reasons that shall soon be evident.

Unlike members of the ruling bloc, intellectuals must maintain some distance —at least in public appearance—from the most powerful and wealthy social groups in their societies. The degree of their credibility and authority depends on some meaningful detachment from activities that appear to primarily generate material and non-material rewards. This public persona is precisely what distinguishes them from the state bureaucrat or emergent business class whose wealth or income may not be significantly different. However, this distance from the politically and economically most powerful is never total or extreme. Intellectuals often enjoy a comfortable life and protection, provided either directly by the most powerful and wealthiest in society, or indirectly by the social order that delivers privileges to them.

Like everyone else, intellectuals in post-colonies are not necessarily wary of gaining wealth and power. What distinguishes them from the rest is the necessity of a general claim and the recognition of their commitment to the pursuance of truth, justice, ethics or beauty above all else. Such commitments should appear to stand firm against compromises for self-interest and worldly material rewards. Thus, there is always an inherent need to deny their privileged status, self-interest or desire for recognition, and occasionally misrecognition of their secret desire for power and wealth.

Unlike the subaltern, post-colonial intellectuals do not sell their manual labour in order to survive. They do not have to work on a permanent basis in the most dangerous, dirty and difficult working environments out of the dull compulsion to survive. Some of them do so voluntarily, and for this they usually reap public awe, special recognition and considerable respect, if not handsome material rewards. This is not to suggest that everything they do is consciously self-serving. Rather, to work effectively, middle class activists have to operate in public; their heroic voluntarism often attracts public admiration, if not more. Hence the phrase ‘public intellectuals’. If this activism proves to be too difficult, the activists can always decide to ‘go home’ to their comfortable and middle class living conditions (see Chapter 5). Despite being distinct from the subaltern, intellectuals must appear to identify themselves with the latter. They are subalternists, not subalterns. [7]

Two ironies are commonly inherent in post-colonial subject positions such as those in Indonesia and Malaysia. First, intellectuals gain their authority by virtue of the difficulties they endure from the repressive measures of the governments towards attempts to undermine such authority. As many Indonesians have come to learn, government bans often promote rather than suppress the circulation and sale of literary, artistic or journalistic works and the fame of those who produce them. The extraordinary stature of the novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer is to some important degree attributable to the enormous perseverance of the novelist during the seemingly endless repression meted out against him by successive regimes in Indonesia. Fully cognizant of this, the Malaysian government decided not to ban the novel *Shit* by the national laureate Shannon Ahmad, though it was a satirical attack on Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (see Chen 1999; Krishnan 1999;

Chapter 7). Detention in police custody often generates respect and boosts the credentials of young activists among Indonesian students.[8]

The second irony is that intellectuals function to undermine and challenge the status quo that gives them their privileged status and authority. While dogs do not bite the hand that feeds them, as the aphorism goes, intellectuals in post-colonies are expected to do so. At the least, they have to claim or pretend to want to bite hard enough. Whether or not individual intellectuals do, and when they do so, is open to debate. As such, the privileged position of post-colonial intellectuals is not recognizable simply in structural politico-economic analysis. Their significance has also been consistently noted and mystified in the public memory and official narratives.

The responses to major events in Indonesia and Malaysia towards the turn of the millennium are a case in point. When Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was stripped of his power in September 1998, many observers wondered whether events in Malaysia would follow the example of Indonesia and lead to the fall of another long-serving head of state, Mahathir. Although the answers were different, many subscribed to the familiar logic of economic determinism, arguing that Malaysia's ability to survive the post-1997 economic difficulties helped stabilize the nation, protect the status quo, and undermine populist attempts to challenge the Prime Minister. Many predicted that the middle classes in Kuala Lumpur would not risk losing the benefits that the status quo offered, regardless of how angry they felt with the incumbent government or how sympathetic they were to Anwar. In more or less the same period, Indonesian student movements were widely celebrated for being partially responsible for the political shake-up that led to the historic resignation of President Suharto, the longest-reigning head of an authoritarian capitalist state. Curiously, however, there has been no systematic attempt to explain what drove or empowered these audacious young urbanites. In fact, in the preceding years, student activists had been similarly and consistently dismissed in mainstream analyses of Indonesian politics.

The histories of both societies have been more complex and colourful than dominant views suggest. For several months in late 1998, thousands of Malaysians took to the streets in confrontation with state security forces. However, they did not do so at all costs or for the long-term. After they withdrew from street confrontation in early 1999, it was far from clear whether they had given up such political activism altogether, became apathetic, or justified the status quo. Economic conditions were a crucial factor in all this, but by themselves they cannot explain many things. What this chapter attempts to do is to see how the experience of being in particular economic conditions has been perceived, mediated, complicated and interjected by other social forces among Malaysian and Indonesian middle class professionals in the 1990s.

In another incident, Professor Chandra Muzaffar, indisputably one of Malaysia's most eminent intellectual-cum-activists, lost his position at the oldest university in the country, the University of Malaya, at the end of his annual contract

on 28 February 1999. Chandra argued, and most observers believed, that the real reasons for the University's decision were political.[9] Chandra had been a prominent critic of the Mahathir government for years, especially during the tumultuous months following Anwar's detention. Many of my interviewees in late February 1999 noted that Chandra took his position at the University of Malaya as part of what appeared to be broader collaborative projects with Anwar, Mahathir's then heir-apparent. When Anwar was detained, his wife Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail institutionalized the passionate mass-based support for him by establishing a non-governmental organization called The Social Justice Movement, better known as ADIL, on 19 December 1998. Chandra was appointed Vice President.

A couple of weeks following Chandra's dismissal, University of Malaya authorities cancelled a forum that was to be held in its grounds and organized by some politically conscious intellectuals in conjunction with the annual general assembly of the Malaysian Social Science Association (MASSA). The forum was meant to discuss 'Contemporary Challenges to Malaysian Intellectuals'. Chandra was one of the four invited speakers. MASSA criticized the cancellation and rescued the aborted discussion under 'other matters' on its agenda (see Mandal 1999a; Zain 1999). Attendees expressed shared concern about the general acquiescence of the country's intellectual communities in the face of blatant injustices. Chandra reportedly asked the questions that many had themselves raised: 'Why have there been no reactions?…Why did academics not stop teaching as a protest? Why did politicians not resign? Why were judges lip-tied?' (Zain 1999).[10]

These questions are morally sound and perfectly legitimate in the immediate context of their articulation. In this chapter, however, they pose a more problematic challenge for critical social analysis. Why should academics, politicians or judges give up their positions for justice and truth in today's Malaysia or anywhere else? Even if they take action, what difference will it make? Implicit in Chandra's questions is the assumption that a different situation should have, may have, or actually existed in Malaysia (past or present) or overseas.[11] This is the kind of assumption, so pervasive in Malaysia and Indonesia, whose history and trajectory I wish to examine.

The real and perceived importance of the cultural politics of middle class intellectuals in the non-capitalist West has been attested to by the serious efforts of ruling regimes, both to seek legitimacy from such intellectuals, and ;to repress them when all efforts to obtain their support seem to fail. Significantly, in the first few months of 1999, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the key member of the ruling coalition in Malaysia, launched a new set of desperate propaganda measures targeting the literati in ways reminiscent of the New Order. Through the tightly controlled mass media, Malaysian state officials regularly inflicted fear on the public by propagating the idea that school teachers were conducting the treacherous act of sowing hatred of the government among their students. University freshmen from 1999 were required to attend a series of state

propaganda sessions, reminiscent of the *Pancasila* (the New Order's state ideology) campaign in the 1980s. Although freedom of speech has been systematically impaired in most societies across the globe, outside the capitalist West it is significant that we see many cases of the prosecution (and persecution) of fiction writers, prisoners of conscience, the banning and burning of books as well as the prosecution and torture of citizens whose crimes have been to produce texts and images.

The contrast between intellectuals in the bourgeois-hegemonic and liberal-democratic 'West' and those in post-colonies as suggested above may be too crude and simplistic. One reason for making such a comparison is to provide the necessary background for the events that I will discuss in the following sections. Another reason, paradoxically, is my intention to show in the ensuing sections that such a contrast has been insidiously but consistently blurred, though it has not totally disappeared.

The two incidents in 1994 to be analyzed below indicate that Indonesia's sustained capitalist development under a conducive global environment eroded the old myths about the sage-like professionals in the production of truth and justice. Middle class intellectuals depend less and less on the long established persona of intellectual selflessness. Increasingly they are inclined to secure their interests in a more modern—at times secular, at others religious—and institutionalized mechanism. These new agendas and demands are not necessarily of their free choice. Instead they have been prompted by the new constellation of market opportunities. However, this does not mean that a rational and economic calculation of cost and benefit rules everything. The hardening of this capitalist consciousness is relatively new in Indonesia and Malaysia. Confusion, disorientation, inconsistency, denial, indecisiveness and ambiguity conflate and compete with old promises of modernity, new confidence and ambition. Together they mark the politics of the contemporary middle classes.

Two conflicts in 1994 captured the Indonesian public's imagination. In retrospect, it is now fairly easy to argue that these two events were preludes to the turbulence that rampaged through the country before the dramatic end of Suharto's rule on 21 May 1998. They also directly bring us back to some of the questions raised in Malaysia following the termination of Chandra Muzaffar's employment. In one of these incidents, an internal conflict split the acclaimed private institution Satya Wacana Christian University (hereafter SWCU), In what appears to have been a separate incident, there were unprecedented nation-wide protests across the archipelago in response to the New Order Government's decision to revoke the licences of the three Jakarta-based weeklies *TEMPO, Editor,* and *DëTIK*.

Satya Wacana: the irony of success

Located in the small town of Salatiga in the mountainous heart of Central Java, SWCU began its history as a modest and little-known institution. It was established in 1956 as a training college to supply secondary school teachers to the Christian

schools that mushroomed throughout the archipelago. Until 1970, campus life was highly communal and its existence was barely noticed by the largely Muslim population of Indonesia. In the subsequent two decades, this small and self-contented university grew far beyond the imagination of its founding members. This development took place in the context of the broader politico-economic developments in the country under the New Order military dictatorship as well as the expansion of global capitalism during the Cold War.[12]

In the 1970s, the development of the campus infrastructure and administration was breathtaking, thanks to the support of various foreign and mainly Christian funding agencies. The University library was reportedly one of the best in the country. In the 1980s, the University was recognized as one of Indonesia's most respected and top-ranking tertiary institutions. This attracted some of the country's outstanding academics and best-qualified students, both of whom in turn helped boost the University's achievements. Interaction with overseas institutions of higher education increased tremendously, generating a vital campus life in the arts and social sciences. In the mid-1980s, SWCU was the first of some 300-odd private universities in Indonesia to be granted a licence to run an accredited post-graduate programme.

As SWCU developed rapidly, there were inevitable negative consequences. Admission became increasingly competitive, and the fees unaffordable to the majority of high school graduates.[13] Apart from its academic excellence, SWCU was also remarkable during this period for another reason. With great pride, it often claimed to be a model in miniature of Indonesia's multiculturalism. In an attempt to sustain its historic roots with supporting churches across the archipelago, the administration implemented a quota system to accommodate a good portion of the students that the regional churches sponsored across the archipelago, occasionally compromising on academic merit. The affirmative-action policy was well justified given the need to rectify the unbalanced state-led industrialization, favouring Java (home of the largest proportion of the population) over other islands, of which many constituted the biggest sources of state revenue from natural resources. A special tuition programme was set up to assist academically inadequate students from disadvantaged regions to be on a par with their schoolmates who represented the most qualified candidates from the major and rapidly industrializing cities of Java.

As a result, SWCU became one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse campuses in the country. It was one of the rare campuses where the national language, Indonesian, rather than one of the several regional languages and mother tongues, was the main language of daily conversation. Although located in Java, ethnic Javanese students never reached half of SWCU's total student population. Unlike the situation in several expensive private and Christian colleges, the number of students of Chinese descent was always below the Javanese.[14]

Admittedly, most of the time SWCU's multiculturalism was understood in colonial terms, characterized by an exoticization of ethnic diversity. What escaped the observation of many was that the institution became a miniature Indonesia in

more than a superficial and exoticized fashion. It was also a miniature of Indonesia in other more dangerous senses—culturally, politically and economically. Despite some resistance from within, the University was subjected to various pressures from both the notoriously interventionist and repressive state apparatus, as well as the economic pragmatism of the unprecedented expansion of industrial capitalism. The levels of such interventionist pressures and the University's resistance to them varied over time. The end result was less ambiguous—the University became increasingly less autonomous as it grew bigger and became incorporated deeper into the management of the militarist New Order regime and the industrial cultures of the economic boom in the 1980s and 1990s.

The University became more elitist than it may have wished. The size of its bureaucracy expanded to the hilt and social relations became far more institutionalized, professionalized and globalized than its administration was able to manage. All of these factors led to a fatal conflict in the mid1990s, ironically as an inevitable consequence of the University's success and excessive growth. The conflict had no precedent in kind or scale in the nation's history.

In short, the SWCU conflict suggests the case of the inability (perhaps impossibility) of a relatively simple and old administrative establishment to respond to the rapid growth of its own institution. In calendrical terms, the administrative establishment was not that old. It had been in existence for only about half a century. Nonetheless, functionally it aged rapidly in a very short span of time. When the SWCU administration tried to respond to these changes and regain control, old assumptions and devices still overshadowed their endeavours. [15] These proved not only ineffective but counter-productive. Not only was this seemingly local conflict embedded in broader social contradictions, I would argue that it was also a prelude to what rampaged through Indonesia after the 1997 economic crisis and the end of Suharto's authoritarianism in 1998.

The official impetus for the SWCU dispute was the election of a new University president. In what may have appeared to be profoundly 'democratic' procedures, the University president (just like most heads of departments and deans) in this private institution had traditionally been elected, allowing all members of the academic community, including the clerical staff, to have a say. 'Communitarian' is perhaps a better term than 'democratic' to characterize the tradition. Until 1993, such elections did not involve competition. There had always been only one popular and highly respected nominee. Thus the electoral system had been well established in the norms and practices of the academic community.

For the first time in the University's history the elections in 1993 involved two very different candidates.[16] Both the electoral process and the results generated serious disagreements. The losing party argued that the existing rules were outdated and required amendments. Unfortunately, such a demand was made only after the defeat was evident. In fact this party lost again in the second round of elections after amendments were made to the electoral procedures. Nonetheless, the Board of Trustees decided to retain and appoint the defeated nominee. This angered the majority of representatives and voters who accused the defeated party

of having betrayed the established convention. All of these, however, were only a fragment of the larger and long-standing antagonism between two internal groups that had lasted for at least ten years.

The University's anniversary had always been the most important occasion for the academic community. In 1993, the anniversary celebration coincided with the inauguration of the new University president. All the deans of faculties but for one (the Faculty of Economics) boycotted the assembly. Rather than simply abstaining from the ceremony and thereby leaving an embarrassing number of empty seats in the long first row of the hall, the deans joined the protest of hundreds of students and staff outside. This was the first time in the University's history that an academic ceremony was heavily guarded by state security forces. Eyewitnesses also claimed to have seen well-known professional thugs on the site. These outsiders came from the provincial capital of Semarang, whose members and leaders were predominantly of the same ethnic group as the incumbent University president. Henceforth, it was difficult to maintain that street and campus fighting between supporters of the two factions involved only members of the institution. In the following year, dissident members of the academic community decided to hold a religious service and celebration of the University's anniversary back to back with the official ceremony. As expected, the unofficial event attracted more people. Before it finished however, it was raided by heavily-built males who appeared to be strangers to the campus.[17]

Unlike previous conflicts within this or any other campus, criticism and counter-criticism of the elections were constantly featured in the mass media. Apparently a little out of touch with developments in the wider society, the Board found the media coverage unacceptable. In retaliation against the popular challenge to its decision in the press, the Board issued official reprimands and litigation threats to selected faculty members before 'dishonourably' dismissing Arief Budiman, an intellectual celebrity in the booming media industry.[18] Actually, it was only after the arrival of Arief at SWCU in 1980 that the institution received regular media attention. Interviews with him on current affairs appeared regularly on the front pages of major dailies, drawing the nation's attention to SWCU.

Instead of ending the controversy, the dismissal provoked even greater outrage that went well beyond the campus. Most classes across the faculties ceased to operate. Far from being deserted, the campus ground was occupied by student protesters who built sit-in tents. Protest banners altered the physical appearance of the campus. A stage with daily 'performances' of protest was set up, on one occasion using a super-powered sound system.[19] A good number of deans and senior faculty members never resumed teaching. The conflict lasted for more than two years, splitting the University community in two, affecting individuals as high in the hierarchy as members of the Board down to part-time janitors and students.

An alliance of many groups of SWCU students and staff called *Kelompok Pro-Demokrasi* (Pro-Democracy Group) rejected the appointment of the new president and demanded both an apology for Arief's dismissal and his reinstatement. They belonged to the group that claimed a total victory in the previous elections of the

president. On the other side was a much smaller circle of staff and students who rallied to defend the appointment of the new president and endorse Arief's dismissal.

For two years the dispute took place on many fronts: lobbying, formal deliberations, petitions, anonymous pamphlets, telephone threats, street violence, legal actions, media warfare and street demonstrations. A general strike by the majority of students as well as the teaching and administrative staff lasted for an uninterrupted period of eight months, paralysing the institution before a mass exodus of students and faculty members towards the end of 1995. Unfortunately, partially dictated by market forces, only the better-qualified teaching staff and students could easily find alternative employment or education.[20]

What made such a dramatic dispute possible in 1993 was not something entirely novel. Rather, the conflict erupted as a result of a host of contradictory processes that took place both inside and outside the University. SWCU was already polarized in the late 1980s, and this division was both an extension of and a response to developments outside the University. Neither of the two main and opposing groups represented exclusively the old Christian missions that founded the University, though a group of loyalists to this cause occupied a space at the margins. At centre stage there were on the one hand those who considered themselves 'the realists',[21] and on the other those who considered themselves intellectuals and 'pro-democracy' activists, many of whom took leading positions in what became *Kelompok Pro-Demokrasi*.

Some of the former conformed while others joined the mainstream of capitalist industrial order. There were both strong coercive pressures and lucrative invitations from outside bodies for members of the academic community to collaborate in various development projects. Many of these projects, like the government itself, needed both the expertise and symbolic legitimacy of those in academic circles. Undoubtedly, there was an equally strong desire on the part of the academics and administration for lucrative rewards from such collaboration, either in material terms or some sort of political protection. More and more academic staff became involved in commissioned research projects under the auspices of governmental and business corporations, both national and foreign. The same activities existed in other academic institutions. SWCU was unusual in its relative openness to this new social transformation and its Protestant spirit of entrepreneurship (or the absence of a neo-feudalistic state officialdom that restricted similar trends in most state universities).

During roughly the same period, military officers, state officials, and representatives of major corporations were invited to get involved in campus life. For instance, they sponsored sports and cultural events or presented seminar papers. The local military marching band took part in campus ceremonies. Teaching staff earned enormous extra income over their meagre salaries by acting as consultants on various external projects, seriously eroding the old loyalty to the home institution. Students from some academic disciplines received attractive employment opportunities in industry immediately after—some even before—

graduation. Prior to the 1970s, when things were small-scale, simple, localized, inward-looking and religiously communal, many of these developments were unimaginable.[22]

The University assumed a flamboyant image in the late 1980s. Paradoxically, the University became reputable for opposing reasons. Indonesia's aggressive capital expansion generated both the new subaltern classes in urban industrial sites as well as the emergent subalternism among the urban middle classes. Intellectual radicalism and subalternism were particularly strong in the 1980s when political repression was at its height and dissenting confrontation was by definition suicidal. Initially such dissent went underground, but in the 1990s it assumed an increasingly higher profile.

Indonesia's capitalism since the 1980s multiplied the number of industrial and labour disputes that found no representation or recourse in the existing legal and political system (see Chapters 3 and 4). The frustration, though contained, and emerging confidence among the middle classes during this period did not differ greatly from developments in Malaysia in the late 1990s (see Chapters 5 and 7). Subalternism in Indonesia and Malaysia has a long history that is too complex to be discussed here. It suffices to conceptualize them here as the consciousness, discourses and practices of urban and privileged intellectuals that inform a self-identification with or representation of disadvantaged social groups.[23] SWCU had some of the most prominent subaltern activists in the nation, in particular Arief Budiman and George Junus Aditjondro.[24] As such, SWCU gained momentum towards becoming politically vital. Its liberal and cosmopolitan outlook as well as its geographical and political distance from the capital city in part prevented the co-optation that impeded similar developments on other campuses.[25]

Banned books were not only available in SWCU libraries—attracting students from other universities—but required reading in some classes. Dissidents from various places were invited to give talks or artistic performances on campus. Labour unionists, pro-independence East Timorese activists, feminists, lawyer-cum-activists, and radical environmentalists also found sympathetic associates. Some of the pioneering leaders of Indonesia's post-1978 student movement studied here. On a number of occasions, the provincial and local military apparatus issued hostile warnings to SWCU student activists. Some of these students and their lecturers were involved in a number of political disputes and trials.

It is important to pause for a moment and recall the questions that Chandra Muzaffar and his colleagues in Malaysia raised about intellectuals' expected subversion and uncompromising activism. What happened in Salatiga and later Indonesia was not something 'natural' or 'normal'. It did not happen regularly. Rather than questioning why there was a lack of moral outrage among Malaysian intellectuals and professionals in early 1999, we should ask why and how there was such outrage in Salatiga in the mid-1990s and Indonesia in the late 1990s. Equally pertinent is the question why such a strong wave of popular dissent in Indonesia did not take place in the 1980s and early 1990s. We should also ask,

under what conditions Malaysians would have decided to press for more radical changes.

Far from being financially poor and politically powerless, subalternist intellectuals from SWCU, as elsewhere, were internationally well-connected. In fact many of these figures earned more than moral and political credentials for engaging in the risky fight against military dictatorship and crony capitalism. They also enjoyed institutional support from various national and international networks in the so-called new social movements. Like their opponents within the same academic institution, these subalternist intellectuals enjoyed privileged conditions that they did not create and that were largely inaccessible to the needy who constituted the vast majority of the population. These privileges included greater mobility, a more cosmopolitan outlook, more external linkages, more career options and less dependence on the home institution than members of the academic community before the 1970s. Given their fairly new self-confidence and power, and given that the basis of their extra income and prestige was not dependent on the University's old patronage network, it is not surprising that these academics were more prepared than were their predecessors to attack their employer and face the retaliations.

This situation did not prevail all over the country, though it was not unique to SWCU. Such a situation had been rare in Malaysia for a long time but was developing rapidly with its own dynamics. There, as in Indonesia, moral purity or courage was never a sole and determining factor. For more than a generation, Malaysian academics earned better salaries and enjoyed better job security, but at the expense of autonomy, as the ruling party and its far-reaching affiliates had been the main employer and patron to many of them.

It is not too difficult then to understand why the 1993 election at SWCU erupted into a fierce and extended conflict, involving broad and materially embedded forces beyond the academy. The candidates in the 1993 elections might not have formally or fully represented the interests of the two camps described above, but they were obviously sympathetic to one of the opposing camps and recognized by most as such.[26] Had one of the parties been far stronger than the other, the dispute would have been quickly resolved. Perhaps no dissident activity would have taken place at all. That an extended and intense battle lasted so long indicated the rise of forces of relatively equal strength in the society at large, from which SWCU's opposing parties derived some support. The same balance of forces explains the protracted conflicts that tore up the nation at the end of the century.

External forces were involved to various degrees in the SWCU dispute, highlighting the broader significance of the incident. Not only did the disputing parties take the initiative to file lawsuits against each other. Not only did the media industry find a mine of saleable subjects in the controversial case, especially when the central figure was Arief. Government bureaucrats and the military were most interested in the case, partly because it had always been in their general interest to maintain security and 'social order', but also because of their long standing antagonism towards many of the pro-democracy activists.

Interestingly, for reasons that are not fully clear to me, even the branches of the state apparatus were clearly split in their response to the SWCU dispute, making it possible for each conflicting party to maintain the partly illusory hope of triumph and for the battle to run much longer than anyone wished.[27] Friction within the political elite was quite visible to many Indonesians then, but not its ramifications at the provincial and local levels or its extent, until the SWCU conflict. Deep divisions within the state apparatus—as well as the emergence and consolidation of middle class politics in the 1990s—were two of several major factors that were responsible for the collapse of Suharto's rule.

That the SWCU affair was not simply an internal institutional matter gains further confirmation from the way national politics evolved around the dramatic downfall of Suharto and its immediate aftermath. To those familiar with the SWCU dispute, what happened in Indonesia around the time of the collapse of the New Order regime was full of parallels, and even repetitions on a larger scale. The list of those parallels is long, but some of the more striking ones are: (a) the conflict found articulation over a formally and narrowly defined issue of succession to executive leadership, though what was at stake was much more complex; (b) the prominence of radical students' protests with banners, rallies, petitions, art happenings and boycotts demanding an end to the status quo (see also Chapter 7); (c) the use of selected globally appealing icons and slogans such as democratization and reform in those protests (see Chapter 6); (d) the support of more senior professionals and officials outside the institution for student activism (more in Chapter 3); (e) the important role of partisan media coverage that not only disseminated news but also authorized the demands for change outside the institutional framework; (f) the conflicting interests of the divided security forces; (g) the partially successful use of racial and religious politics as rallying points to mobilize support or discredit enemies (see Chapters 6 and 7); and (h) the proliferation of insidious slander, street violence, anonymous pamphlets, and the character assassination of certain individuals.

As with all comparisons, there are limits to the above, and parallels should not be overdrawn. A vivid contrast between what happened in Salatiga and Jakarta lies between the survival of the incumbent administrator at SWCU and the downfall of Suharto. One of the important reasons for this difference was timing. The unpopular president of SWCU survived the conflict (despite his repeated intentions to resign when the pressure was strong), partly because the broad political climate and supportive state officials in Jakarta were still very strong in the mid-1990s. It is difficult to imagine that the event would have evolved in the same way had the SWCU conflict broken out shortly before or after Suharto's resignation.

Contrary to popular accounts in the mass media, it is significant that the SWCU conflict—as well as the growth of the institution itself—is deeply related to broader processes of social change at the national and global level. The conflict cannot be reduced to the election of the University president. It was not primarily about 'good guys' and 'bad guys', as argued by opposing sides in the course of

the conflict. In various ways the conflict drew its energy, adopted its textures and features, and generated consequences far beyond the immediate concerns of the members of the academic institution.

The dispute was not the work of external conspiracy or direct intervention, as some suspected.[28] Rather, it was the consequence of a number of separable but related developments: (a) SWCU's rapid institutional growth beyond the capacity of the institution to manage it; (b) the broader and aggressive expansion of industrial capitalism in the nation under the repressive militarist regime of the New Order; (c) the rise and internationalization of both conservative and progressive middle class intellectuals; and (d) the aggravated abuses of human rights, labour rights and women's rights, and other practices of deprivation and violence against the underclasses that are fairly familiar in places experiencing the expansion of industrial capitalism.[29] The case of SWCU was historically situated and thoroughly embedded in broader national politics and the global economy. It foreshadowed what took place in the central administration of the nation-state towards the end of the 1990s.

A new generation of journalists was thoroughly and actively involved in the SWCU conflict as external parties. Next, I will discuss the reasons why they became involved in the conflict rather than remaining distant observers. I will also demonstrate that the major upheavals that Indonesian academics at SWCU underwent was not unique. Subjected to similar global forces, journalists encountered comparable challenges.

Industrialization of the media

In what appeared to be a separate incident, on 21 June 1994 the New Order revoked the licences of three Jakarta-based weeklies: *TEMPO, Editor,* and *DëTIK*.[30] Arbitrary banning was commonplace under the New Order. No less than thirty cases of temporary or permanent bans had occurred before 1994. What distinguished the 1994 banning from its predecessors was the response from those immediately affected by the government decision, and more importantly, the response of the public at large. Nothing illustrates this better than what took place in Salatiga: the two battling parties suspended their war for a day or two to jointly hold a mass rally in protest against the banning, before resuming a fiercer battle in the days that followed.

The ban was a good indication of several things about the New Order and the media industry. Instead of displaying its prowess, the ban indicates the regime's paranoia about the assertiveness of emerging middle class intellectuals and their power base, the mass media. The ban also expressed a serious fear of irrevocable divisions within the ruling elite, especially between the President and senior military officers. Whatever motivated the official ban on the three weeklies, the decision indicated how the incumbent government had lost touch with a social reality marked by the emergence of a broad middle class politics that, in turn, was

a result of industrialization. This was vividly shown by the public outrage that took most by surprise, not least government officials.

Elsewhere I have discussed in more detail the broad middle class response to the above banning and its political significance (Heryanto 1996a: 245–53). To sum up its most obvious features: first, the demonstrations in protest against the 1994 banning constituted the first nation-wide expression of public resentment towards a single issue over an extended period of time and took place when demonstrations were still illegal. Previous demonstrations had been largely concentrated in specific locales over specific and unrelated or short-lived issues, though some drew more media attention due to the violence involved. Second, the protests against the bans were predominantly led and attended by the middle classes, though participants included those better categorized as the under and upper classes (for a similar phenomenon see Chapter 6). The protests were predominantly a middle class event because that was the single most important characteristic of the protesters that came to the fore, surpassing differences of ethnicity, gender, profession, religion or ideological orientation. Third, this was the first time in New Order Indonesia that a press banning had brought together rival journalists in public protest, in defence of their own corporate and professional interests. In the past, the suppression of individual journalists or media companies did not necessarily stir fellow journalists. Worse still, some even took advantage of the situation to undermine competitors. Finally, this was the first instance in which a ban was followed by apologetic statements from the authorities within a few weeks, and a conditional offer of new press licences in lieu of those revoked.

Beyond venting their anger in street demonstrations across the archipelago, middle class urbanites used the momentum to launch a series of historically novel ventures. For the first time under the New Order, one of the media bans was challenged by *TEMPO* in a lawsuit in the State Administrative Court. Thousands of its readers authorized a team of lawyers to file a separate class action suit, just as the hurriedly established association of parents of SWCU students sued the University for failing to provide a regular education for their children. In a striking parallel to Arief's legal case against SWCU, *TEMPO* eventually won the lawsuit at the High Court level thanks to the political divisions within the institution of justice.[31]

Many of the journalists who lost jobs established the first independent *Aliansi Jurnalis Independen* (AJI, Alliance of Independent Journalists) in direct confrontation with the state sanctioned *Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia* (PWI, Indonesian Journalist Union). Membership of AJI made it difficult for reporters from the banned media to find new jobs.[32] On one occasion, several members of AJI were tried and prosecuted for organizing a public gathering without a permit. AJI drew support from reporters working in other media, who suffered reprimands or dismissals for their links with the then illegal association. Meanwhile commemorations of the 1994 ban kept public memory alive, lifting the fighting spirit of AJI's members and sympathizers.

When the government held general elections in 1997, some of the core activists from the banned media, together with fellow activists from elsewhere, established Indonesia's first Independent Committee for Monitoring the Elections, or *Komite Independen Pengawas Pemilu* (KIPP), directly challenging the government's Monitoring Committee. Although it could not possibly claim sole or prime responsibility for the success of the 1999 general elections in Indonesia, KIPP was one of the first serious and systematic attempts in more than thirty years to provide long overdue civil and political mass education on general elections in Indonesia. Such education challenged not only the existing dictatorship's engineered victory well in advance of election time, but also the general tendency of the public to boycott or to resort to street violence (Heryanto 1996b). During the 1999 elections, scores of NGOs followed suit and launched a nation-wide campaign for electoral democracy as well as civic and political education.[33] These included significant contributions from women's activist groups as indicated in Chapter 6. Indonesian activists learaed this new practice from their counterparts in the Philippines and Thailand, and together they inspired the Malaysian activists in anticipation of the crucial post-Anwar elections of 1999 (see Chapters 5 and 6).

In what follows, I attempt to show that the above developments could take place in Indonesia due to reasons similar or related to the historic conflict at SWCU. I will discuss the process that Indonesian journalists and their observers commonly called the 'industrialization' of journalism (for more see Heryanto and Adi 2002). The next section will be followed by another on the intricate relationships between Indonesia's intellectual activists (such as those in SWCU) and contemporary journalists (such as those of the three banned weeklies). Together, the next two sections will elucidate both the parallels and the interactions between the processes that shaped the experiences of academics (like those in SWCU), the journalists who covered the SWCU incident as well as those banned in 1994.

By and large, nationalism remains the most powerful ideology in Indonesia (Heryanto 1990b: 290), just as ethnicization is the single most determining factor in Malaysia's politics, economy, and culture (Mandal 1998b; Kahn 1996a, 1996b; Gomez and Jomo 1997). In Indonesia, nationalist ideology is perhaps the most durable, sanctified and widely appealing discourse in comparison to those on *Pancasila,* religion, race or development and modernity. State officials invariably have attempted to legitimize and maximize the authority of their positions, discourses and ideologies by highlighting their service in the interest of the 'nation', whatever the word has meant to the different people concerned. A wide range of opposition to the ruling governments as well as a variety of non-governmental activisms similarly has relied on the sanctity of nationalist discourses to launch different, and not infrequently conflicting, agendas. An instructive case is the conflation of motherhood with concern for the nation in the analysis in Chapter 6 of Indonesian women's activism in 1998–9. Only since 1990 has Islam begun to be deployed with success by the Suharto government and segments of the population, rivalling nationalist discourses (Hefner 2000;

Heryanto 1999b: 173–6),[34] while this process began in the 1980s in Malaysia and is presently well established (Chapter 5).

By no means does the foregoing suggest that in day-to-day practice people are consistently and readily willing to die for the nation.[35] Perhaps the contrary is true, as demonstrated by the violent confrontations among fellow citizens during much of the nation's independent history and more recently the series of inter-ethnic killings in 1996–9 (see Bertrand 2001). What this implies, however, is the unrivalled orthodoxy of nationalist ideology in verbal claims, rituals, slogans and popular sentiments, in spite of conduct that contradicts the orthodoxy.

It is important to mention the status of nationalist ideology because journalists and academics have been the main authors of national history and nationalist discourses, as well as the main protagonists in these narratives. Almost without exception, the historical canons of the nation give the greatest credit to the role played by these middle class subjects. Even the well-known 'alternative' narrative of the nation's history during the New Order accords no less recognition and respect to the role of journalists and academic intellectuals. I refer to the tetralogy of Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1980a, 1980b, 1985, 1988) that in many other ways turns official history on its head.[36]

The considerable honour and moral authority that the highly educated literati and the press have enjoyed from the early 1900s continued very much unaltered to the century's end. Although the native literati in colonial Malaya had similar positions, their status in the nationalist discourse of independent Malaysia has not been as heroically romanticized as their Indonesian counterparts. As many pioneering journalists in Malaysia's history were left-leaning nationalists who were marginalized if not purged by the British and the independent governments, their post-colonial history has been ambiguously stated if not erased. To a considerable extent, the history of violent confrontations that the Indonesians went through before achieving independence has contributed to the romanticization of the literati and the press. Perhaps this past has also been the stimulus for the passionate nationalism that often makes it difficult for Indonesians to see contradictions when they engage in violent conflicts with fellow nationals.

If anything, what many colonial and post-colonial authoritarian regimes do is to reaffirm myths by inflicting a series of repressive measures (severe censorship, bans, prosecution, kidnappings, tortures and murders) against men and women of letters and their works. This too was more visible in New Order Indonesia than Malaysia. The torture of Anwar in police custody was more shocking to Malaysians than Indonesians. However, the last two decades of the century may be a major and irreversible historical watershed in many Asian societies, including Indonesia and Malaysia.

From the 1980s, Indonesian observers have incessantly lamented that the Indonesian press underwent a serious transformation from *'pers perjuangan'* (journalistic political activism) to *'pers industri'* (the industrialized press).[37] A similar process occurred in Malaysia in the 1990s where it is referred to as the 'corporatization' of the media (Loh and Mustafa 1996; Nain 1998). Among its

diverse and nuanced messages, the observed transformation in Indonesia refers to the perceived trend among journalists to compromise truth, justice, impartiality and informational functions in order to survive the increasingly competitive market as well as the state's repressive measures.

Such an observation may be problematic because it overly romanticizes the history of the press in order to assert a point about the present. Many proponents of such arguments overlook the early history of the institution when an 'industrialized press' was for years the rule rather than an aberration (see Wibisono 1993:449–50). Excessive generalization may lead not only to nostalgic inaccuracy about the past, but also to uncritical utopianism. Standing on high moral ground, many of these critics assume that media institutions have a lot more options and room for manoeuvre than they actually do. They also paint a very monolithic picture of the media industry as well as audience reception. The case of the 1994 bans and the responses to them exposes the flaws in such zealous criticism.

Rather than simply describing the reality, to some degree the unfailing complaints underscore a continued and pervasive faith in and expectation of what academics and journalists could have done or ought to do. Despite the qualified truth in what they say (to be elaborated below), these critics sustain the ethos of *pers perjuangan* in the midst of the demoralization, apathy, disillusionment and confusion, if not opportunism and mediocrity, that has accompanied the sustained industrialization of Indonesia and Malaysia. The petition to the government signed by nearly 600 Malaysian print journalists from eleven major press companies in early May 1999 was a desperate expression of wider social frustrations (Chen 1999).[38] In Indonesia, where most people had much less confidence in the law and were more accustomed to extra-parliamentary confrontations, these frustrations took a different shape and found different expressions.

Observers have noted with dismay that over the extended period of the New Order's rule, there was a consistent increase in media readership, along with a decrease in the number of owners (see Dhakidae 1991:324–85; David Hill 1994: 81–110; Hanazaki 1996:135–54). Informed estimates suggest that at the time of the 1994 ban, *TEMPO* had a circulation of 200,000, *Editor* 60,000 and *DëTIK,* the country's biggest tabloid, 600,000. For the first time Indonesia saw a major conglomeration of media groups, where the ownership of twenty or more media companies was concentrated in the hands of a few, while the conglomerates diversified their business empires to various other industries as well (see David Hill 1994:81–110; Sen and Hill 2000: 54–64). During more or less the same period, various offices and administrators within SWCU were responsible for institutional expansion, so that in the early 1980s SWCU and its affiliated institutions ran accredited education, from the level of kindergarten up to post-graduate degrees, within the same complex.

Statistics aside, in the early 1990s I observed other things related to professionalization and the market-driven work ethos of journalism. Increasingly, veteran journalists from the generation that grew up during or soon after the Second World War were marginalized by the influx of young university graduates

through a professional rite of passage. The Jakartabased daily, *Kompas,* one of the two largest circulation newspapers in Southeast Asia, began to administer recruitment tests as late as 1981. Equally significant, these younger journalists had no first-hand experience of any journalism other than the new and rapidly industrialized press of the New Order economic boom. In 1990,1 met final-year undergraduates or new graduates who earned around one million rupiah (US$500) a month working as local correspondents for the national dailies and weeklies, when civil servants (including university lecturers) and military officers of their age and comparable qualifications would make approximately one-third of that amount. In neighbouring Malaysia, emerging young Malay professionals in the formal sectors were also the first generation of privileged citizens formed almost exclusively under the New Economic Policy (1970–90).[39] They constituted the first generation of the so-called New (Rich) Malays (see Shamsul 1999).

The dramatic shift in what it meant to be a journalist (and for that matter an Indonesian citizen, Asian, specific gender and ethnic group, or consumer) is too complex to be addressed here (see Young 1999), but I will try to capture some fragments below. In increasingly sharp contrast with their predecessors, younger journalists and their seniors who kept up with the changing times were pushed to enter a new battlefield—one driven by market competition. They also had to adapt to the expanding lifestyle of the country's new rich: exchanging business cards, manipulating the latest computer software, travelling overseas frequently, driving cars, engaging in fine dining in five-star hotels, attending extravagant parties, and becoming more sophisticated with the form and style, rather than the substance, of their writing. Meanwhile the orientation towards mass entertainment persistently challenged the commitment to education or the discussion of serious public issues in the press. By the early 1990s it was common for young and competent journalists to move from one company to another, either in search of material reward, professional integrity, or autonomy.

In the same period, Indonesian academics such as those at SWCU discovered with delight the vast possibilities of work and self-development in many places other than the home institution that first brought them to prominence. Significantly, it was also in the late 1980s and early 1990s that Indonesia saw for the first time the new phenomenon of competitive advertisement of schools, colleges and tuition as well as news magazines, newspapers and even televised programmes. Previously the educational and media institutions shared with the medical and legal services a public image of being separate from and above the profit-driven market economy. Notably, the University of Malaya was 'corporatized' only two years prior to the decision to terminate Chandra Muzaffar.

Rapid industrialization did not necessarily blunt the radical edge of journalists and academics in Indonesia or Malaysia. The political significance of *nauveau riche* consumerism and lifestytes is much more ambiguous than generally understood (Heryanto 1999b). Indeed, along with the professionalization, industrialization and internationalization of journalism in Indonesia and Malaysia,

there was an upsurge in discontent. Not everyone became better off, and many felt they had not obtained or achieved as much as they thought they should.

While it is undeniable that the policies and achievements of the New Order in Indonesia and the *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) in Malaysia heavily favoured the urban middle and upper classes, the old romantic myth of selfless urban middle class intellectuals still found its contemporary enthusiasts among this segment of the population. This was extremely evident in the later years of the 1990s, across regional and cultural, ethnic and gender differences. Extra-parliamentary political activism (just like a variety of religious devotions) found its new vitality during the economic boom. This was also the period that witnessed the proliferation of internationally connected NGOs in Southeast Asia.[40] The profound and multifarious links between politically conscious journalists and their intellectual counterparts on campuses deserve a closer look.

Professionalized activism

Student activism in Indonesia is well known. Less noted is the extent to which such activism has been indebted to the activism of individual journalists and the institution of journalism as a whole. Although generalization can be problematic, one can say that the student press was a very important recruiting ground for young activists. The student press was also instrumental to their political and organizational training, intellectual development, campaigns and networking with those outside their own campuses. This is true especially, but not exclusively, of the various periods when the New Order was at the height of its power and repression abounded; when street demonstrations appeared suicidal and the commercial press was generally acquiescent to the status quo. In some instances student publications preceded the open discussion of sensitive issues that appeared in the international and domestic press only after Suharto's down-fall. Examples include questions of the ill-gotten wealth of the former first family and its cronies; the renewed question of the links between state power and Islam; and the rejection of the military's doctrine of *Dwifungsi* (dual function) that legitimized its active intervention in non-military social institutions.[41]

One cannot understand the resilience of the student press without looking at the generous assistance of senior journalists and leading media companies. Student organizations on campus held regular workshops on training in journalism, often with the financial assistance and expert advice of established media companies. When these students were in the process of preparing publications, they often enjoyed advantages unavailable to many commercial journalists. There were cases where well-researched but sensitive materials prepared by senior journalists could not appear in their own media because their superiors did not want to take the risk. Much in demand by the public, such materials occasionally found space in the student press. When friction within the New Order's political elite became acute, several retired generals preferred to be interviewed by foreign journalists and illegal student journalists rather than their officially-sanctioned Indonesian

counterparts. All of this helped boost the appeal and sales of the student press in public.

Many such external bodies continue to reap some of the fruits of this development. They have the means to identify the best potential recruits. Many senior journalists in the leading companies (including those banned in 1994) have had their own years of student activism, if not of imprisonment for political activism. It is not hard to understand why in recruiting new staff they are more inclined to select candidates with some experience of activism either in street demonstrations or the campus press. This is more than simple nepotism or sentimentalism. Journalism in Indonesia has always been a very dangerous career. Not unlike student activists, journalists in Indonesia have regularly been subjected to verbal abuse, intimidation, death threats, kidnapping, detention, torture and murder (Luwarso 2000; Tesoro 2000; Suranto *et al.* 1999:61–79). Over the years, as these new recruits enter more important positions in the company, they continue the tradition of supporting their juniors in the student press.

The relationship between student and journalistic activism does not stop there. Student activists feature prominently in the commercial press. The press gives generous space to them, because they have the licence and credibility to articulate issues that the public wants to hear and the press cannot present in their own editorials. In more liberal countries these issues would have been raised and debated in parliament. These student activists articulate or mediate the voice of the suppressed population who have no representation in the existing political institutions.[42] Almost without exception, student activists have been largely portrayed in the media as pro-democracy heroes and heroines.

Street demonstrations without media coverage are doomed to be inconsequential. Indonesian women activists learned this lesson in the course of the various events they organized in 1998–9 (see Chapter 6). Most of the time, street demonstrations, no matter how well attended, or how spectacular as acts of oration, cannot last very long and have no power to alter existing regulations or state power. They have very little effect unless their message is amplified and authorized in the national public consciousness through the mass media. Street demonstrations function like a whistle at best. To have any further impact, they must create a snowballing effect that prompts formal deliberations by the authorities, sometimes located several hundred kilometres from the site of the demonstrations. To be effective a demonstration must first pass a test, namely, occupying the pages of the print media or the screen of an electronic broadcast. But media production follows certain imperatives and logic. No matter how sympathetic reporters are to the cause of a demonstration, what they submit will be subjected to editorial review. Veterans of Indonesian protest are well aware of this, so that locales, timing, lettering in banners, or yells and other spectacles in a demonstration are carefully selected to maximize media coverage (see also Chapters 6 and 7).

Intimate relationships between intellectuals and journalists go further. Older than these students, smaller in number and less passionate in diction, but no less

authoritative, are the voices of selected critically-minded 'intellectuals'. They may work as artists, academics, lawyers or religious leaders. At the same time they play a role similar to student activists and build similarly intimate relationships with politically conscious senior journalists from the commercial press. The press is keen to interview these middle class professionals and publish their opinion columns. These intellectuals are keen to write columns for many good reasons, not least because they generate extra income that most academics need to make ends meet and keep up with research costs.[43] Far from being subjected to restrictions on receiving external remuneration, Indonesian lecturers who write regularly for the press often earn prestige, and in some areas additional incentives from their home institutions. Lecturers who write critically of the status quo more often get respect, fame and political protection rather than retaliation.[44] It is always easier for the state to inflict violence upon the anonymous masses or unknown individuals.

Indonesian middle class activists have differed on many fronts and have been greatly divided (see Uhlin 1997), as the split within SWCU vividly exemplifies. However, systematic repression from the New Order state has forced them to unite against the common enemy, as the protests against the 1994 bans demonstrated. Although similar processes have taken place simultaneously in neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia, their intensity has been linked to the government's ability to intervene and co-opt these professions. In Indonesia, either due to a lack of interest or capacity, or different priorities, the New Order had limited control over this middle class solidarity building. That explains why journalists flocked to defend academic or student activism when the latter was under government attack. And conversely, we have seen the broad middle class outrage at the 1994 bans.

Such solidarity did not exist in Malaysia in the 1990s. Although legal restrictions and extra-legal repressions were more severe in Indonesia, mainstream journalists and journalism in Malaysia had less activist experience or ties with academics, NGOs or student activists. With controlling shares in the ownership of the media, the Malaysian government had more political control over the industry. Until the 1980s, the Malaysian government had a near monopoly over educational institutions—especially at the preuniversity tertiary level—while in Indonesia private schools have outnumbered their state counterparts for many years. In the 1980s there were already around five private colleges and universities for every single state tertiary institution in Indonesia. Understandably, both journalists and academics in Malaysia had stronger ties with and dependence on the government than among their own middle class. Such horizontal solidarity did exist among some groups (more in Chapters 3 and 7), but a broad-based national solidarity was difficult to achieve because of strong fragmentation along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines (more in Chapters 5 and 6). This explains the general public anger towards the mainstream media during the first few months of the Anwar saga. Some angry Malaysians launched a public campaign to boycott the domestic media. Others went as far as physically attacking the state-sponsored

media crews and their properties during street demonstrations and Anwar's trial in April 1999.

I have discussed at length the material basis for the economic and political alliance of the Indonesian academics and journalists. Before concluding this section, I wish to mention one more area of interest, underscoring both the novelty and the depth of the relationships between the industrialized media in Indonesia and the politics of middle class professionals, by returning to the discussion of the SWCU conflict. I have mentioned that one of the novel factors that played a major role in the institutional break-up was the media coverage. To say that the media reported intensively, or even blew up the case, is an understatement. One of the most amazing things about the whole SWCU saga was the power of the media during the course of the conflict. Technically, this could not have happened in Indonesia twenty or even fifteen years earlier.

Arief's irregular dismissal captured great attention during the course of the three-year dispute. Officially, he was dismissed for allegedly defaming the University authorities and slandering its electoral process. Actually, we never learned what Arief said. All we had was a media report of what he could have said during interviews about the election. For the next twenty months or so, the escalating battle between the two camps took place in the pages of the press. Although the SWCU campus was small (the student population was under 7,000), most people, including key figures in the dispute, could not directly follow the day-to-day developments of the diffused conflict directly. They had to rely on media reports of the day that were edited and printed several hundred kilometres away from the small campus. Hardly a day passed during the two-year period without the presence of competing correspondents on campus. Attacks and counter-attacks were launched as far as the media pages allowed. Those who better understood the media space were in an advantageous position.

Because the dissenting Pro-Democracy Group was far closer to the press (in almost all senses: personally, historically, culturally and ideologically), media coverage was almost without exception sympathetic to it. This was one reason why the protest lasted so long. Although there was no single and immediate causal relationship, the bans on the three Jakarta-based periodicals were to some extent a signal of the failure of the authoritarian regime to woo, intimidate or co-opt the media; a failure that led to its downfall. Malaysia in 1999 had a rather different situation, though this was not always the case. After a number of antagonistic encounters with the foreign media, Prime Minister Mahathir was challenged by nearly 600 mildly hostile journalists. Had one battleground been lost to the middle classes? It may not be long before we see whether that was a beginning of the end.

Conclusion: challenges ahead

This chapter examined effective challenges to the most durable authoritarianism in industrializing Southeast Asian societies. Contrary to theories of economic determinism, under certain circumstances the growing middle classes can play an

important role in challenging long-standing authoritarianism in their own country. The efficacy of middle class politics does not derive from the middle classes' essential status as 'intellectuals' as the dominant myth in Indonesia or Malaysia would have us believe. Neither does it come from their own efforts alone, voluntarism, individual commitment, size or organizational capability as other commentators have postulated.

At least two lessons can be drawn from the case of Indonesia discussed above. Firstly, democratization requires a lot more than just voluntary struggle, sacrifices and martyrs among its proponents. It also requires particular historical conditions that are conducive to such struggles. Two related but distinguishable processes appear to have been responsible for such conditions in Indonesia. The first is the long-lasting and prolific reproduction of myths about selfless and truth-seeking public intellectuals as embodied in the university student, academic, and journalist activist. The second is the expansion of capitalist industrialization under heavy militarist rule that has delivered sustained economic growth but at the expense of human and civil rights. This historical moment is highly transitional in nature. As Hagen Koo (1991) argues in relation to similar situations in South Korea, the real and perceived significance of middle class activism will be subject to change in the years to come.

Second, democratization or its sibling *Reformasi* can develop effectively when it is more than a grand design or clever policy from an enlightened political elite. The preoccupation with questions of successions and struggles within the political elite in Indonesia and Malaysia, that dominates mainstream analyses, may prove to be less worthwhile than it at first appears. The same applies to viewing women's advancement through the achievements of particular elite or heroic female leaders (see Chapter 6). Democratic dispositions that grow in everyday consciousness, discourses and practices on small and local scales will provide a crucial foundation for a larger movement when the right moment comes for various forces to converge (see Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 7). In such an event, formal organization or leadership is less necessary. In the foregoing we see how the outlook, determination and practices in support of democratization in university life or journalism came to maturity in local disputes. Actually a large number of similar incidents took place involving a wide variety of social organizations and geographical locations in Indonesia during the same period (see Heryanto 1996a: 261, 1997a). Perhaps, the winds of change had also been blowing for some time in the private lives of many Indonesians and Malaysians alike.

The uneven industrial development in Indonesia and Malaysia has certainly favoured some segments of the population over others. The urban middle classes have indisputably been benefactors. Most of them have been empowered economically, but more significantly in the cultural and political domains. We have seen the paradoxical responses of some of these middle classes to the status quo that provided them with privileges; and the anger of authoritarian leaders such as Mahathir as late as 2002 at what appears to them to be the ingratitude of the middle classes who tacitly or actively supported *Reformasi* efforts. What I have

not discussed above is the fact that the same process of industrialization also threatens to disempower the middle classes. In short, and to use the terms of the opening sections of this chapter, the old myth of selfless intellectual activism has been seriously eroded. It is perhaps not accidental that this should happen in a time when the hegemonic thrall of nationalism has also been seriously challenged (Kahn 1998:18–24). As discussed earlier, Indonesian nationalism put urban middle class intellectuals on a pedestal. While new positions and statuses promise new comforts and career prospects, they do not necessarily sustain the moral authority middle class intellectuals used to enjoy as a given. The features of this new era are not very clear.

In 1994, the administration of SWCU discovered that it had lost the unreserved allegiance that it had enjoyed from its faculty and administrative staff for decades. It was taken aback when confronted with the challenge from its academic community in what then appeared so unbecoming, a general strike. The academic and administrative staff also soon discovered that they had confronted not a less-than-benign patron but a corporate employer. Not all of them were equally prepared to encounter the new threat, namely termination of employment. Relations of employer-employee came to the fore as never before, surpassing the familiar communalism that had dominated life in SWCU since its inception.

Because these modern industrial moves and counter-moves were so abruptly new in the personal experience (if not consciousness) of many in the SWCU dispute, their legitimacy was hotly debated on the campus and beyond. Many wondered whether it was morally correct for 'intellectuals' to hold a strike. Others defended it as a modern, justifiable and non-violent industrial action protected by law. Likewise, the legitimacy of dismissal of tenured faculty on the basis of allegedly inaccurate or improper statements in the media was intensely discussed and debated. More than a few teaching staff were appalled by the new and official pronouncements that equated intellectuals with salaried employees. These and many other ethical questions take a longer time to enter into public debates than individual investments, economic policies, or projects. Regardless of the economic recovery and the fate of industrialization in Indonesia after the 1997–8 crisis, the rapid industrialization in Indonesia during the 1980s and 1990s left profound and durable impacts on the consciousness and social relations of the urban middle classes.

While the plight of *TEMPO* began with an attack from an external force, and the response it provoked appeared to be morally-based activism, it did not take long for everyone to realize that the banning also meant an immense financial loss and the unemployment of hundreds of talented and innocent workers, with neither compensation nor trials. The industrial dimension of the event was obscenely exposed when the government offered a new license to *TEMPO,* conditional on the establishment of a new management and new shareholders—all from among politically well-connected businessmen. The *TEMPO* staff were painfully split into two groups, The first half filed an unprecedented, and what then appeared to be unrealistic, lawsuit, technically meaning that the legal status and all activities

pertaining to *TEMPO* must be suspended for judiciary investigation. The second half apologetically welcomed the new arrangement and helped publish the new weekly *GATRA* that adopted both the look and journalistic style of *TEMPO*. Many of these compromising journalists defended their actions by invoking the compulsion of economic necessity for family survival (Heryanto and Adi 2002).

Similar economic calculations repeatedly undermined the efforts of the Pro-Democracy Group, during and before the eight-month-long general strike at SWCU. Obviously, there can never be any final answer to judge the rationale for either position. Neither was there any direct correlation between the resilience of such resistance and levels of wealth ownership. Many of the better-off lecturers (owning more than one luxurious house or fancy car) at SWCU gave up their participation in the mass protest very early on, complaining that they could not afford the costs of challenging the University authorities.

Future developments of democratization in Indonesia and Malaysia will depend to a considerable extent on the answers to many such economic and moral questions. Middle class-based radicalism in Indonesia in 1998–9 may have impressed activists in neighbouring Malaysia, as attested by the adoption of the terms *Reformasi* and *KKN* (see Chapter 1).[45] However, as Malaysian middle class and pro-democracy activists look at the middle class radicalism in Indonesia with some enthusiasm, sooner or later their Indonesian counterparts must answer some of the difficult questions about employment and democratization that have slowed down the challenge to authoritarianism in more industrialized Malaysia. There is much for each to learn from its neighbour.

Notes

This chapter has benefited from comments on earlier drafts by individuals who do not necessarily share the views expressed here. The writer is most indebted to Joel S.Kahn, Hong Lysa, and Mary Zurbuchen for various moral and intellectual support. Kasian Tejapira, Maribeth Erb, Arief Budiman, Liek Wilardjo, Daniel Lev, Budiawan Purwadi, Martin Richter and P.M.Laksono provided helpful comments. Stanley Yoseph Adi and Rungrawee Chalermsripinyorat helped find a few bibliographic details. The writer is solely responsible for any remaining shortcomings to this chapter.

1 The most relevant of the literature includes Crouch (1985), Hal Hill (1994), Jomo (1997), Gomez and Jomo (1997), Jones (1994), Kahn (1996a), and Robison (1986, 1996).

2 For a recent review of the literature on the Malaysian middle classes see Abdul Rahman (2002). For Indonesia, see Zulkarnain *et al.* (1993), Zulkifli (1996), Prasetyantoko (1999) and Hadijaya (1999). Many of the points in the next few paragraphs derive from Heryanto (1990a). The first (and the only in English) collected volume of essays on the Indonesian middle class politics is Tanter and Young (1990). According to Abdul Rahman (2002), writings on the Malaysian

middle classes have all been spread across separate essays and articles, and no single book has yet been published on the subject.

3 I have been critical of these dominant and dismissive views since the early debates of Indonesian middle classes in Indonesia (Heryanto 1990a, 1993b). Exceptions to the dominant views include K. Young (1990) and Lev (1990) on the Indonesian middle classes, and Kahn (1996a, 1996b) on their Malaysian counterparts.

4 Admittedly there is no way to determine non-arbitrarily, empirically, and precisely, how 'enormous' the economic or bureaucratic power of the upper classes is. Consequently, we can never set a clear-cut boundary to separate the lower end of the upper classes from the upper tiers of the middle classes. The two in practice may move back and forth and swap positions. Having admitted the grey area, one can still proceed with an analysis of the narrowly selected segments within the middle classes that are located more in the 'middle' ranks. I refer to the majority of journalists, university students and lecturers, and most artists in contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia.

5 Joel Kahn (1996b) argues, and I agree, that owning 'something' such as a certain salary, property, occupation, skill, knowledge or expertise, does not necessarily make someone a member of the middle class as we discuss it here. What does, Kasian Tejapira suggests, is the performative aspect of the use of such knowledge and skills in selected public settings that endow significant moral authority to such performance and its performers (personal communication, email dated 28 September 1999). Thus the view adopted here considers historically specific social 'practice' to be more important than 'things'.

6 Compared to Indonesia, Malaysia is more Westernized. To use the Gramscian model, social order in Malaysia was sustained more by consensual than coercive measures, whereas in Indonesia it was the reverse. At least until the mid-1980s, justice and law enforcement had more credibility and power to discipline citizens in Malaysia than Indonesia. Understandably, one finds more of a concentration of activists, and for longer periods, in the legal profession in Malaysia than in Indonesia.

Overall, Malaysia has been more industrialized than Indonesia. Militarist authoritarianism in New Order Indonesia saw the easy and frequent use of violence to keep order and suppress dissent, but paradoxically that bred counter violence and radicalized dissidents. Indonesia's extended revolutionary struggles against the foreign colonizers and the continued efforts to keep alive the romantic memories of such struggles find no equivalent in Malaysia, whose independence was granted rather than fought for. Ironically what we witnessed during the turmoil in 1998 and 1999 were reverse trends. More violence was deployed by state apparatuses in Malaysia (symbolized by Anwar Ibrahim's black-eye during detention), while Indonesia completed peaceful elections precisely when or because the military took retreating steps from politics.

7 Being a male feminist is never the same as being a female, just as being a Malaysianist is not the same as being a Malaysian.

8 By extension such logic seems to have worked in favour of Megawati Sukarnoputri and Anwar Ibrahim. Their prominence as rallying icons for *Reformasi* was commonly attributable not to their own efforts, but to the repressive measures that the ruling government inflicted upon them. A list of similar figures can be extended to Aung San Suu Kyi, or Benigno and Corazon Aquino. None of these individuals, however, represent what we understand as 'middle classes' in this chapter.

9 Two factors are highly suspicious in the termination of his employment, The university's decision was made very suddenly, and the professor was given less than a week's prior notice. The official reasons for the decision were budget constraints and administrative efficiency. In his press conference in late February 1999, Chandra presented facts and figures that contradicted the official rationale for his dismissal. Details on the case and public responses were available online (as of 24 December 1999) at: http://www.jaring.my/just/chandra_removal.htm

10 In a soul-searching essay, Rustam Sani, a prominent Malaysian public intellectual and Chandra's close friend, declared what he perceived to be the two most important obstacles in the push towards *Reformasi* in Malaysia: emigrant mentality (an inferiority complex and selfishness) that impedes many, but not all, in the Chinese population; and Malay neo-feudalisin (Sani 1999).

11 In the same electronic posting (Zain 1999), the writer adds: 'In other free countries, a blow of this scale onto the academic freedom of expressions will definitely provoke great controversy at least among fellow academics.' Indeed such incidents occurred in neighbouring Indonesia, as will be elaborated in the next section, but they could occur only under particular circumstances that electronic mailings do not usually have the space for mention or elaboration.

12 Having participated directly in the events, I am both privileged and disadvantaged. On the one hand, I am able to supply the rich and complex nuances of the events without making them explicit in the ensuing account. On the other, I have to restrain my passion to expose ethnographical details that may not be immediately relevant, overlooking the larger forces at work and failing to make a critical analysis that requires some distancing and analytical abstraction. I decided to foreground the broader structures and consciously try to avoid any moral judgements of the positions of individuals involved in the conflict, without any illusions that it would be possible to present a purely objective and neutral account of the event.

13 Living several hundred kilometres away, I had not heard of this university's existence until a few weeks prior to my attempt to seek admission in the mid-1970s, I applied there only after I discovered that I could not afford to pay the admission fees for a local school of engineering at a more prestigious state university in the city of Malang that offered me admission. I was admitted to SWCU soon after paying an admission fee one-fifth of what was demanded in the state-funded university. Two decades later the ratio was in reverse. Some of the best applicants who succeeded the admission tests at SWCU had to pay fees four or five times what their counterparts paid in the state university in Malang.

14 Most state universities imposed quota restrictions to limit the number of students of Chinese descent. Consequently, young Chinese Indonesians flocked into private schools or pursued overseas study. In the early 1980s, the President of SWCU claimed that the University had the smallest percentage of students of Chinese descent among Christian schools.

15 These measures include paternalistic counselling, religious rituals, moralistic persuasion, or threats. Daniel Dhakidae (1991:388–98) provides a more elaborate account of a parallel process taking place in the media industry.

16 Informed readers will note that fairly soon afterwards, Indonesia also saw for the first time a general election where more than one presidential hopeful was officially in fierce competition. Malaysia had institutionalized electoral democracy much earlier. During Suharto's New Order regime, nomination of alternative presidents

took place more than once, but it was never legal or taken seriously by the public. If anything, the nomination was seen largely as an expression of dissent.

17 It is important to mention this because the same style of conflict resolution has been one defining feature of Indonesia's national politics as evident in the series of state-sponsored acts of violence from 1993 outside the war zones of East Timor, West Irian, and Aceh.

18 Incidentally Arief Budiman is a friend of Chandra Muzaffar. In 1984 Chandra visited SWCU for a conference which Arief convened.

19 The reappropriation of the campus space thus accomplished may have prefigured the use of art and music to similar ends by women and arts activists in 1998–9 (see Chapters 6 and 7).

20 From 1995 there were serious attempts on the part of these dissenting academics to work together with a consortium of major business groups in the capital city of Semarang to open a completely new university system. Had this taken place, the exodus of the academic and administrative staff would have been greater with the existence of new opportunities at a nearby institution. Just before the institution began to operate, the economic crisis of 1997 provided the fatal blow to the project.

21 Key proponents of this group called themselves as such but I cannot be certain how widely acceptable such designation was among their constituents.

22 In the mid-1970s, the only 'parking space' available was for bicycles. In the 1990s, there was never enough parking space for the luxury cars of the students. In the mid-1970s, more than a few classes began with a class prayer.

23 For contemporary subalternism in Malaysia, see Kahn (1994, 1996a: 70) and Abdul Rahman (2002); for Indonesia see Aspinall (1996), Heryanto (1989, 1996a, 1996c) and Uhlin (1997).

24 Soon after completing his studies in the USA, in 1980 Arief Budiman decided to join SWCU. His unsolicited decision was a significant recognition of SWCU's merits. He was the attraction for many Indonesian academics and university lecturers from various parts of the country. Other important academics joined the ranks soon afterwards, one of whom was the Cornell University graduate, George Junus Aditjondro. The Post-graduate Programme, where Arief and George were the two core faculty members, soon developed to be well-known nationally and internationally as a centre of academic pursuits as well as liberal thinking and public intellectualism. It also became too autonomous for the central administration to control. The programme was the bastion of dissident life in the conflict that will be discussed below. Both Arief and George found new university positions in Australia soon after they left SWCU, in 1997 and 1995 respectively. After Suharto was forced to resign in 1998, George was best known for being one of the most well-informed researchers on the wealth of the ousted President Suharto, his family, and cronies across the globe (see Liebhold 1999; *Time* 1999).

25 For decades, student politics in Indonesia had its bases in top state-universities such as the University of Indonesia (Jakarta), the Institute of Technology in Bandung (Bandung), or Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta). The ruthless military crackdown on campuses, the banning of all independent student bodies, the introduction of new and tightly state-controlled student bodies from 1978, and the systematic co-optation of younger cohorts of academics had eliminated any systematic and overt dissent in campuses for over a decade. Student politics re-emerged in public after 1989, but with a series of remarkably different profiles and

more radical agendas. Unlike their predecessors, student movements in 1989 found their bases in private universities away from the capital city. SWCU was only one of several of these. The Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta was one of the very few old campuses that continued to house such activism. Significantly, Jakarta student movements that helped push President Suharto's downfall in May 1998 had their bases in private universities, of which Trisakti University has become legendary due to the shootings at a peaceful gathering there. Unlike their predecessors, post-1978 student activists came from more humble family backgrounds economically, politically, or culturally, and were regularly engaged with the emerging politics of the underclasses, both in rural and urban areas. Unlike their predecessors who demanded more accountable government, these activists demanded more profound political change and social transformation. Finally, in marked difference from their predecessors, the majority of student movements after 1978 consciously transcended ethnic and religious divisions. This found its equivalent in the street protests in Kuala Lumpur from 1998, after twenty years of absence.

26 Liek Wilardjo, the nominee of the Pro-Democracy Group, was best known as a physicist and one of the country's strongest opponents to then-Minister Habibie's proposed project of a nuclear generating plant on the north coast of Central Java.

27 The same argument may be made with reference to Megawati Sukarnoputri's surprising resilience in outliving Suharto's presidency.

28 At least two rumours of conspiracy circulated at the time. One suspected that the government had successfully destroyed the institutional base of critical dissidents, if not the whole university. The other was suspicious of the conspirational work of segments within the newly emerging Islamic-leaning social forces that allied with Suharto's and later Habibie's governments. Arief Budiman is a Muslim. Such rumours expressed more about the anxieties of those who circulated them than the events.

29 The more famous case of recent decades has been China's rapid and sustained industrialization which was one of the factors leading to the Tiananmen Square killings on 4 June 1989.

30 For a fuller account of the banning and its historical context, see Hanazaki (1996: 199–252).

31 Arief won a total victory in court, that ruled all his demands be met by SWCU. The plaintiff appealed to the higher courts, but lost throughout. Nonetheless, SWCU refused to obey the court ruling and Arief never insisted on its execution. In Jakarta *TEMPO* gained victory only to the level of Higher Court. Soon after President Suharto's downfall, the news magazine regained its licence and republished.

32 Students and staff who left SWCU in defiance of the incumbent administrator found it easier to transfer to other private universities such as the University of Sanata Dharma in Yogyakarta.

33 While the successful elections of 1999 have been widely recognized, most commentators do not mention the efforts of thousands of these committed political instructors. This is not to suggest, however, that they take full responsibility for the low levels of fraud and violence during the elections. Several other factors must also have made it possible, for instance the general demoralization and widespread wariness of any confrontation immediately following a long and uninterrupted series of spectacular civic and state violence over a span of more than two years,

34 Talk of secessions both before and especially after Suharto's downfall did not necessarily undermine the above arguments. Not only were there strong anxieties about national disintegration, underscoring the desired or ideal, but among those who felt they had had enough of Jakarta's heavy-handed Javanese imperialism, the desirable alternatives appeared to be the independence of new nations, rather than, say, anarchy or other forms of post-national sentiments.

35 Benedict Anderson's theory of nations as imagined communities has been well-noted, where, *inter alia,* he characterizes the nationalist sentiment as a 'deep horizontal comradeship…[that has made] it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for' the nation (Anderson 1983:16).

36 The most telling example is the opposite portrayal of Budi Utomo in the two historical narratives. For decades, the government officially declared the Javanese aristocrat's association to be the first modern organization with a nationalist cause. Pramoedya's novels, a product of nearly twenty years of research, portrayed the body principally as an exclusively Javanese elite club that the colonial regime tolerated precisely because of its non-challenging agendas, Also in contrast to the official account of the nation's early formation, Pramoedya's historical narratives accorded more recognition to the merits and contributions of females, the underclasses, Eurasians and ethnic Chinese.

37 The best and most comprehensive expression of such a view can be found in Yayasan Keluarga Bhakti (1993).

38 Malaysian journalists complained about their eroded credibility in public, called for more press freedom, and demanded the repeal of the Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984. Under the Act, media companies have to renew their permit to publish annually, depending upon the degree of their support for the government of the day. As expected, the government did not accommodate the visibly courageous challenge, unseen since the mid-1980s when there was a protest against the 'amendment that widened the powers of the Official Secrets Act' (Chen 1999).

39 This refers to the affirmative-action policy primarily in support of the ethnic Malay majority as well as other officially classified *Bumiputera* or 'indigenous' (see also Chapter 1) that was launched in 1971 and meant to be completed in 1991. It was nevertheless extended with some modification.

40 It was during this time that Chandra Muzaffar visited SWCU as mentioned earlier.

41 Richard Robison's (1986) main data and arguments about the economic empires of Suharto and his family were widely circulated in photocopies across campuses several years before they became a public controversy in Indonesia following David Jenkins's article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1986.

42 The situation changed somewhat with the fall of Suharto when the commercial press, political parties, and members of parliament had more space to contest views (see Suranto *et al.* 1999). In neighbouring Malaysia, alternative and oppositional journalism found more expression on the Internet, given the available electronic resources and the absence of space to distribute material in print. This development took place prior to the Anwar saga (see Mee 1998).

43 In a private conversation with an academic colleague from Bangkok in the mid1990s, I learned of the striking similarities between situations in Indonesia and Thailand from the early 1990s. On the one hand, there was a sudden and rapid boom of the media industry in both countries without adequate human resources. On the other,

there was an influx of young and talented postgraduates with overseas training who found their universities lacking both in terms of academic challenges and material incentives. The symbiosis between the media industry and these highly energetic academics could not have been better timed. Some of the prominent academics in both countries could receive remunerations on a regular basis, as much as five times their salaries, if not more, from writing columns. The situation was somewhat different in Malaysia, where lecturers earned better salaries.

44 Obviously there is a limit to this criticism, but such a limit is never fixed, often (but not always exclusively) in direct parallel to the political climate of the day.

45 The rallying cry of *Reformasi* in 1998–9 was not authored by Indonesian student activists. Its currency was apparently the product of high level diplomatic exchanges between officials of the International Monetary Fund and the New Order government in reference to something more radical to pressurize President Suharto to follow an agreed deal. In any case, once again the mass media accorded the word such salience in public discourse that radical students did not have much choice but to adopt it to communicate effectively with the masses. More than once Indonesian activists attempted to replace it with more radical signifiers such as *transformasi* (transformation) or *revolusi* (revolution), to no avail. The best result they achieved was popularizing the idea of *reformasi total* (total reform) which is a contradiction in terms.

3
Developing dissent in industrializing localities
Civil society in Penang and Batam

Philip F.Kelly

The triangular relationship between economic development, democratization and civil society formation does not lend itself to simple formulations and correlation. Even where predictions that economic development would bring democratization to East and Southeast Asia have not been confounded, the correlation between the two is at best unclear. Civil society formation, meanwhile, has not proven to be a sufficient condition for democratization, and there is no *a priori* reason why it should be a necessary one either. To further confound predictability in this tangled trinity, the concepts themselves—development, democracy and civil society—are fluid and highly contested. This chapter seeks some clarity in this debate by exploring such ideas in concrete terms and in specific places.

Two locations in particular form the focus of attention—the State[1] of Penang (and more specifically Penang Island) in Malaysia and the Island of Batam in Riau province, Indonesia. These two islands share several important characteristics. Both have been sites of rapid industrial development over the last thirty years in the case of Penang, and in the last decade in the case of Batam. Each island has seen significant social, economic and environmental dislocations as a result of rapid industrial development. In both cases such development has largely been driven by foreign direct investment, with the electronics and garments industries being particularly significant. Much of the industrial workforce in each case has been young, female and migrant: drawn from around the Indonesian archipelago to Batam; and from the rest of Malaysia or from Indonesia and Bangladesh, to Penang. Finally, both locations have benefited economically from state administrative frameworks closely attuned to servicing the needs of global capital.

In some senses, however, a comparison of Penang and Batam is rather forced. Industrial development has overlain very different antecedent conditions in each place: Penang as a historically important colonial trading centre established in the eighteenth century with a nationally anomalous ethnic composition; Batam as a minor outpost of the Indonesian archipelago, populated by just a few small fishing villages. Industrial development itself has taken different trajectories in each case. Penang has emerged as a significant node in the global geography of the electronics industry where an increasingly sophisticated local industrial structure has developed, capturing higher value processes in the production chain. Batam, meanwhile, remains largely at the level of product assembly, with higher-end

functions remaining in Singapore or elsewhere in the global structures of the firms located there. More important than the distinctiveness of development trajectories in each place, however, are the very different national contexts of regulation and political power in which they lie. Penang's development has been in the context of a bureaucratic or statist authoritarianism in which the power of the executive has been consolidated at the expense of other sites of political influence. The State has also industrialized in the context of a federal system of government, with considerable pro-activity on the part of State government agencies. Batam, on the other hand, developed in the tight grip of a centralized and militaristic authoritarianism under Suharto's New Order.

Despite these differences, perhaps even because of them, a comparison of two such industrializing locations is instructive in addressing the development-democratization-civil society nexus. Firstly, it is precisely through comparison that distinctive state-driven processes of authoritarian developmentalism, and the varied responses to them, are better identified. Urban middle class civil society organizations in Penang provide alternative visions to the bureaucratic authoritarianism that pervades the country as a whole. Yet these are quite different from the mass-based oppositional forces that emerged in the militaristic authoritarianism of Indonesia. The contrast with Batam is still more acute, where neither mass-based nor middle class movements have taken root.

A second benefit derived from adopting two localized case studies is the light cast upon the geographical variability of civil society formation and democratization within the national state. Just as the state itself is not a monolithic institution, but incorporates multiple competing positions and constituencies within itself at the national level, it is equally true that across the national territory the constitution of its powers and resistance to them are unevenly developed. Thus Penang presents a case where autonomous political space is relatively well developed among certain segments of the population relative to other locations in Malaysia. Batam, on the other hand, provides a quite different environment. In both of these ways then, examining such contrasting experiences provides some clues concerning the conditions necessary for the development of civil society, and the specific circumstances in both local and national contexts that have extended or limited these conditions.

The first section of this chapter examines the notion of civil society and its relationship to the state apparatus. A narrowed definition of civil society will be developed that emphasizes its dialectical—dependent yet autonomous—relationship with the state and its role as a sphere of independent reformist political ideas. Importantly, given the contexts under discussion, the elements of civil society examined here will largely be confined to secular movements. Subsequent sections of the chapter then examine the Indonesian and Malaysian examples in turn, starting with the structural conditions of economic development and political power at a national level, and then exploring the localized processes of industrial development in the two case study locations of Penang and Batam. In each case

the development of civil society organizations in the context of a rapidly industrializing and developing locality is examined.

Civil society, development and the state

The concept of civil society has a long and diverse heritage, passing through the works of Hegel, de Tocqueville, Marx, and Gramsci. More recently the notion of an active social space between the state and the individual has been absorbed into the mainstream of development thinking through its embrace by the World Bank and donor agencies. The nature of this social space is, however, far from clearly defined. Two issues in particular are keenly debated—the extent to which civil society forms a sphere that is autonomous from the state, and the extent to which that autonomy necessarily implies a critical perspective on state policies and power. How these issues are resolved determines which associations or groupings are considered as being a part of civil society and the role that it should play in (creating) a democratic society.

Gibbon (1998) identifies two principal episodes in the twentieth century during which the concept of civil society has held particular currency. The first was in the writings of Gramsci, who sought to identify the reasons why class-based imperatives did not have an immediate and decisive impact upon the political outcome of economic collapse and armed insurrection in Western and Central Europe during the second decade of the century, as they had in Russia in 1917. Gramsci locates the explanation for this diversity of experiences in the heterogeneous and diffuse political and ideological arena created by a civil society of political organizations and private associations. For Gramsci this sphere provided insulation against revolutionary change—it was not therefore, in his view, necessarily a desirable phenomenon.

The second moment of intense interest in civil society came in the 1970s (and fairly continuously since then) in Eastern Europe, reflecting the activities of anti-authoritarian movements, notably in Poland and Czechoslovakia. There, civil society was seen as a positive intervention between politically atomized, powerless individuals and the totalitarian, all-encompassing state. During the 1980s, this revived interest in civil society broadened to reflect a desire in leftist intellectual thinking for a means of moving beyond purely class-based politics towards a more diverse set of theoretical-political concerns (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). There emerged an overwhelming interest in 'new social movements', with their assumed transformative potential to broaden and deepen democratic political space (Escobar 1992). Thus civil society currently tends to be seen as a progressive set of political forces rather than the conservative, insulating influence that Gramsci conceptualized. Nevertheless, the 'mainstreaming' of the concept in the 1990s has undoubtedly somewhat blunted the radical 'edge' implicit in some usage. Indeed the role now scripted for NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and grassroots organizations in development policy circles tends to view them as service providers, often in lieu of the state (see review by McIlwaine 1998). Such

organizations are certainly constituents of civil society, but in most definitions they would not be coterminous with it, although this is a distinction that is seldom made.

Civil society is then a concept that has been through multiple mutations and meanings. One area of particular debate concerns the relationship between civil society and the state. Authors such as Rodan (1996) view civil society as autonomous from the state and yet existing in a political space that presupposes the state's existence. In other words, the notion of civil society is meaningless without noting its relationship with the state, which underwrites the independent political space of civil society (Rodan 1996:4). This relationship may be critical, collaborative or co-optive, but it is nevertheless essential when civil society is taken to be *non*-state associational life in the public sphere. Furthermore, civil society is, in Hewison and Rodan's (1996) view, a source of political opposition to state power, albeit with the provisos that opposition need not solely be located there and not all elements of civil society must be oppositional or indeed progressive as shown in most chapters in this book. Not all would see civil society in this directly oppositional role, with many preferring to represent it as a source of extra-governmental input to policy reform (see for example, Tay 1998).

This chapter is broadly aligned with Rodan's conception of civil society as autonomous from the state. In addition, the definition applied here assumes that civil society organizations incorporate some element of social or political reform in their agenda for advocacy and activism. This focus implicitly excludes a number of movements that might otherwise be included under the rubric of civil society. Service or welfare oriented community organizations that fill the gap left by inadequate provision of public goods, for example, are largely ignored. Religious organizations are also excluded, although they too may undertake socially engaged activities beyond their spiritual mission. We are therefore primarily interested in those secular social organizations, autonomous from government, that play some kind of reformist role of advocacy and activism in seeking to bring about social or political change.

A final point should be noted concerning the application of these concepts to Penang and Batam. As will be described in more detail below, each represents a place at the forefront of their respective national experiences of industrial development. In recent years much discussion has revolved around the role of economic development in fostering democratization through an assumed relationship between increasing wealth, the emergence of a 'middle class', increasing social pluralism, involvement in civil society organizations, political awareness, and thus an expanding political space in which oppositional or alternative visions might be articulated. The middle class has formed a particular focus of attention (see Heryanto 1996a, and Chapter 2). While many of the civil society organizations in Penang and Batam to be discussed below might be described as 'middle class' in the sense that they have urban, cosmopolitan and sometimes intellectually driven agendas, the emphasis here is not upon the middle class as a force for democratization *per se*. Instead, we will focus on the

organizations themselves, and particularly those that have attempted to challenge some of the effects of rapid industrial development in terms of labour rights, environmental degradation, and in some cases, political reform more broadly. The groups highlighted here are also generally secular, attempting to transcend ethnic and linguistic boundaries rather than build mass support within them.

Malaysia: bureaucratic and developmental authoritarianism

Malaysia's political system is characterized by what has been variously termed statist democracy or bureaucratic authoritarianism. Oppositional political visions and activities may exist, but they are subject to the strict and variable control of the state (see Jesudason 1995, 1996; Saravanamuttu 1989; Crouch 1996). As outlined in Chapter 1, the mechanisms of such control are largely bureaucratic rather than violent and comprise a variety of institutional mechanisms. These include legislative tools such as the Societies Act, Official Secrets Act and Internal Security Act (which has, not infrequently, been used to subject individual detainees to violent intimidation and interrogation (see Ramakrishnan 2001)); the close regulation of trade union formation; a democratic system in which money politics and gerrymandered constituencies have ensured the entrenchment of the ruling coalition; the weakening of the judiciary's role as an impartial arbiter; heavy government control over the media; and, a blurring of lines between the state, the government, the executive and UMNO as the dominant party in the ruling coalition (for elaboration see Jesudason 1995; Barraclough 1985; Crouch 1996: ch. 5). Many of these restrictions were justified, under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in particular, in the name of developmentalism, and legitimized in terms of an Asian' alternative to Western liberalism (see Khoo 1995; Chapter 7 in this book). In other words, the kind of rapid development experienced by Penang and other states in the Malaysian federation in the late 1990s is intimately connected with discourses of Asian democracy' promulgated by Mahathir and other political leaders.

Despite the growing strength of oppositional politics and calls for political reform, regulatory restrictions on Malaysian NGOs have, if anything, been tightened since 1998. In April 1998, for example, an amendment to the Companies Act was passed that empowered the Registrar of Companies to refuse to register or wind up a company deemed (in his/her opinion) to be prejudicial to one of the following: peace, welfare, security, public order, good order, public interest, national security or morality (*New Straits Times,* 24 April 1999:6). This remarkably broad tool was aimed at restricting the activities of many NGOs, who had registered as companies to avoid the already stringent criteria of incorporation under the Societies Act. In July 2001, amendments to the Registration of Businesses Act were passed by the Malaysian parliament, so that when NGOs are registered as businesses rather than societies or trade unions, they are subject to the same stringent controls and threat of deregistration, and are required to submit

annual reports of their activities to the government (SUARAM 2001). In this instance, whether they are registered as societies, companies or businesses, NGOs will be required to submit annual reports of their activities to the government (*Straits Times,* 7 May 1999:41). This then, is the national structural context in which the development of civil society organization in Penang must be understood.

Penang in context

In the colonial era, Penang was established as a major centre for the North of Malaya, servicing a resource-rich hinterland extracting tin, rubber and other resources. These commodity chains were constituted by liaisons between British agencies and a network of local Chinese trading capital (McGee *et al.* 1989). Reflecting this concentration of the Chinese population in commercial and trading activities, and a history of immigrant settlement, Penang emerged as a State with a majority of ethnic Chinese. In the State as a whole, the Chinese community represented 55 per cent of the population by 1947, but in municipal areas the proportion rose to around 72 per cent.

By the late 1960s, the State's economy was in decline as it was eclipsed by other service centres that attracted investment elsewhere. Adding to the economic problems, its status as a free port was rescinded in 1969. In response to these declining fortunes the State government embarked upon a policy of industrialization through the Penang Development Corporation (PDC) established in 1970. Taking advantage of policy adjustments at the national level (in particular the Investment Incentives Act of 1968 and the Free Trade Zone Act of 1971) the PDC established a series of serviced industrial estates, some with the status of free trade zones.

Penang's advantages in terms of a cheap and well-educated labour force, a developed infrastructure of port and airport facilities, and the links with its hinterland (a future source of labour migrants), all created local conditions conducive to industrial growth. In conjunction with national policies to attract foreign investment and a series of shifts in the global economy creating a new international division of labour, the State's manufacturing sector grew rapidly. The State averaged 8 per cent annual economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s and exceeded 12 per cent in the early and mid-1990s (PDC n.d.). Between 1970 and 1995 the share of manufacturing in the State's economy rose from 12.7 per cent to 54.8 per cent (PDC n.d.). Employment in manufacturing industries grew from 2,784 in 31 factories in 1970 to 193,308 in 733 factories by June 1998 (figures taken from the PDC website, http://www.pdc.gov.my, 1999). The overwhelming focus of Penang's industrial sector is on the electronics industry, employing 62 per cent of the manufacturing workforce. Penang is now established as a major centre of production in the global electronics industry with nearly all of the major international manufacturers of semiconductors and computer hardware located there, and a well-developed network of supplier and ancillary firms.

In short, Penang has been transformed over the last thirty years into a major industrial hub. While PDC figures indicate the loss of 3,466 jobs between 1996 and June 1998, Penang was left relatively unscathed by the regional economic crisis of 1997–8 (see *Far Eastern Economic Review,* March 1998). Some infrastructure projects, such as a third link between the island and the mainland, have been put on hold by the federal government, but the State's economy continues to experience an excess of labour demand over supply.

Various social and environmental costs have been associated with Penang's rapid economic growth. The development of beach resorts at Batu Ferringhi in the 1970s contributed to Penang's status as Malaysia's premier tourist attraction but sparked considerable local opposition at the same time. The pressure for urban expansion also led to the planned development of Penang Hill—a project cancelled in the face of strong local resistance to urban encroachment upon an extensively forested public property (this episode is discussed in detail below). Currently, Georgetown's historic core is threatened by redevelopment as rent control legislation, repealed in 1997, was fully withdrawn at the end of 1999. At the human scale, employment in local electronics factories has been an economic boon, but it has occurred under repressive anti-union legislation that bans unionization in the sector unless organized at the firm level. Thus, while the upgrading of skills and working conditions in the local electronic industry has been widely noted, workers have been without common representation to push for minimum working conditions or wages (see Rasiah 1996).

Secular civil society in Penang

Despite stringent laws concerning popular activism and the formation of societies, Penang has developed a remarkably rich civil society comprising groups that seek to address some of the consequences of development and modernization. The sheer number and diversity of such organizations sets Penang apart from the rest of Malaysia—only in Kuala Lumpur itself can a similar concentration of activist organizations be found. In a notorious quote in 1986, when five critical NGOs were singled out by a federal cabinet minister as 'thorns in the flesh' of the nation. three of the five were based in Penang. Reform-oriented secular civil society organizations in Penang have, however, adopted a diverse range of strategies in pursuing their goals. Focusing on the most prominent of these organizations, this section examines some of those strategies.

Critical collaboration: CAP and MNS

A strategic but critical collaboration with state authorities is often seen by many NGOs as the most appropriate means of furthering their agendas, not least because the state is far from monolithic and many individuals within it are sympathetic to at least some of their goals. This strategy is perhaps best exemplified by the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) and its affiliated organizations.

Together they undoubtedly form Penang's highest-profile NGO. Founded in 1969 by S.M.Idris, CAP has since grown to make its voice heard not just in Penang, but also nationally and internationally. CAP interprets 'consumer' issues broadly, to include the right of every consumer (i.e. every person) to basic needs such as food, housing, health care, sanitation, public transport, education and a clean environment. CAP is therefore much more than a 'product watchdog' or a complaints bureau. It is equally concerned with developmental, environmental and even human rights issues in a way that sets it apart from many other consumers' associations.

Around 70 people are employed at CAP's headquarters in an old mansion on the outskirts of Georgetown while the association retains an affiliated law firm with four practising lawyers. The organization is divided into sections focusing on research, community and rural issues, education, complaints, legal issues, publications, and the media. While the organization itself operates predominantly in English and is avowedly secular (and therefore tends to lack a mass base of support for mobilization), it does engage in extensive work at the community level. Much of this results from complaints brought to its attention by individuals and small groups, which CAP then takes up with the appropriate authorities and through the media. The Association's own newspaper, *Utusan Konsumer,* has a circulation of 80,000 and is printed in English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. The Association also has an extensive website that features statements, reports and research papers on issues such as product safety, food and health, culture, consumer rights, development, rural concerns, legal issues and the environment. In addition to its numerous informal international linkages, CAP's founders also established a global organization, Consumers International, in the 1970s. Based in Amsterdam, the latter's Asia-Pacific headquarters is in Penang.

Environmental issues are also addressed by CAP's 'sister' organization *Sahabat Alam Malaysia* (SAM or Friends of the Earth Malaysia) which has a separate location and much smaller staff. Like CAP, SAM was founded by S.M.Idris, but is also affiliated with Friends of the Earth International, with whom it exchanges materials and information. SAM acts as a monitoring and advocacy organization for environmental concerns both in Penang and across Malaysia. Campaigns in the late 1990s have addressed pollution and hill slope development in Penang, to radioactive tin mine tailings in Perak, to the rights of indigenous peoples in areas threatened by dam construction in Sarawak.

While CAP and SAM have extensive international networks of their own, another member of the 'family', Third World Network (TWN), provides an explicit international focus to complement the largely local and national terms of reference of CAP and SAM. Through newsletters, magazines, books and conferences, TWN takes a global perspective, addressing issues such as world trade, international financial institutions, biotechnology and agribusiness, global environmental issues and international politics.

Each member of the CAP family is supported through publication sales, donations and contributions in kind. While some international funding through

bilateral or multilateral agencies is available for certain projects, such sources are limited. Foreign funding also brings with it the danger of accusations by the state that organizations are subject to foreign influence.

Overall, the politics of CAP and its affiliates might be characterized as critical, at times even verging on radical, but the organization also maintains strong channels of communication with governmental authorities. The current Chief Minister of Penang is a former CAP official and has established a State Ministry of Consumer Affairs. CAP thus has both personal and institutional mechanisms through which to influence policy or address issues. Moreover, CAP's credibility is greatly enhanced by the expertise that it has demonstrated on a variety of issues over the years. Perhaps the most important element of CAP's success has been the linkages it has forged as a largely urban, middle class and English-speaking organization with a mass base in other communities on the one hand, and with national and international channels on the other.

Several issues emerge from the example of CAP. Firstly, although it is primarily an organization of middle class, English-speaking urbanites, and does not have a mass base or large membership, CAP does reach out in several senses. Through the complaints and collective struggles that it takes on board, it engages with community-level movements. With its access to governmental machinery and media channels, CAP is able to 'enlarge' such struggles to the state and federal levels. Thus while few of the secular organizations discussed here have popular bases of support in the way that religiously or ethnically based groups do, CAP has been highly effective in linking 'small' issues with a much wider network of influence and advocacy. Secondly, CAP and its associates are also able to activate an extensive international network, such that major campaigns—for example SAM's work concerning the plight of indigenous peoples in Sarawak or the impact of dam construction—are enlarged to a global scale. In this way, parochial concerns become issues tackled by global civil society.

CAP and other NGOs are represented on various *ad hoc* government committees —a feature unique to Penang and not found in other Malaysian states. In general, however, CAP's position remains at least an 'arm's length' from the government, and some would argue that SAM, for example, is at the more vocal and radical end of the environmentalist spectrum. Other organizations take on a more collaborative relationship with the state. In the environmental movement in particular, the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) adopts a quite different approach from SAM, avoiding explicitly political statements and adopting a non-confrontational relationship with existing power structures.

MNS, founded in 1940, is the country's oldest NGO. The society's brand of environmentalism is conservationist, and it defines itself as 'dedicated to the study, conservation, protection and enjoyment of the Malaysian natural heritage and the surrounding region'. The society publishes a scientific journal, the *Malayan Nature Journal,* and a popular magazine, *Malayan Naturalist*. Local activities in the Penang branch include nature walks, lectures, camping trips and bird watching. Broader issues such as specific threats to the environment and activities such as

recycling are addressed through press statements and public awareness campaigns. All press statements, however, are released through the society's Kuala Lumpur headquarters and are carefully calibrated to avoid the appearance of politicizing environmental issues. Thus, while organizations such as SAM remain distant from and critical of existing political structures, the MNS works closely with government and frequently provides representatives for governmental committees such as the State Environmental Council. Indeed, the Society's national headquarters in Selangor is provided free of charge by the State government, while in Penang the society's branch office is in subsidized premises in the government-run Caring Society Complex *(Kompleks Masyarakat Penyayang)*.

Collaboration then, whether erring more on the critical side in the case of CAP/SAM, or the more collaborative in the case of MNS, has been a strategy adopted by several secular civil society organizations in Penang. Given the bureaucratic powers at the state's disposal to limit the activities of such organizations, it would seem that they have little choice. This would appear to be a strategic means of occupying an autonomous political space within an authoritarian context.

Critical consciousness through alternative media: Aliran

A second form of independent political space carved out for civil society in Penang has been created through alternative media, seeking to raise and maintain critical consciousness in the face of the government-controlled national media. The leading example of this is Aliran. *Aliran Kesedaran Negara* (National Consciousness Movement) was founded in Penang in August 1977 by a group of seven Malaysians of differing ethnic backgrounds led by political scientist Chandra Muzaffar (see also Chapter 2). It is now a national organization 'dedicated to justice, freedom and solidarity', with a philosophy that explicitly promotes universal values and rejects politics based on ethnic, religious or linguistic identities. The group's main activity is the publication of the *Aliran Monthly* magazine started in 1980. During its early years, the organization was closely identified with Penang and addressed mainly local issues.

In the 1990s the group gained prominence as a critical voice on human rights, corruption, money politics, judicial independence and other contemporary issues in Malaysia as a whole. The group's executive committee members have faced surveillance, and despite various attempts by the federal government to close down the magazine, the group's membership grew in the 1990s. By 1999 membership stood at about 220 and subscriptions to the magazine at around 4,000. More telling, however, is the growth in *Aliran Monthly's* total circulation figures in the late 1990s, from around 10,000 in mid-1998, to almost 20,000 by mid-1999.

The growing popularity of *Aliran Monthly* represents a significant shift in political consciousness among many Malaysians in the wake of the sacking and trial of Anwar Ibrahim. In the mid-1980s, the magazine had tried to popularize its message by publishing articles in Malay, but its relatively intellectual style could not compete against the local tabloid press. Now, however, it seems that there is

a growing appetite for Aliran's critical political commentary amongst an English-speaking middle class. Malays and others disturbed by recent political developments have turned to Aliran and other alternative media for information. *Harakah,* the newspaper of the opposition Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), is reported to have seen its circulation grow from 80,000 prior to Anwar's arrest in September 1998, to as much as 366,000 by the end of 1999 (*New Straits Times,* 31 December 1999: 31), while some of the dozens of *Reformasi* websites saw several million hits in the year following Anwar's arrest in September 1998. The role of such media outlets, and Aliran in particular in the case of Penang, has been to keep open a channel of alternative political thinking—an oppositional imaginative space to subvert the dominant power of Malaysia's political establishment and mainstream media.

Civil society networking: Friends of Penang Hill

A third form of strength and resilience in Penang's civil society, although one seldom mobilized, has been derived from the networks of organizations coming together around a specific issue. Perhaps surprisingly, however, many of those involved in NGO activities in Penang argue that little sense of 'community' exists amongst them. On a day-to-day basis, individual organizations tend to stick to their particular 'issue' and engage in limited interaction or collaboration. Some overlap occurs where individuals are involved in several groups and certainly all are familiar with the key figures and current activities of other organizations, but there have been few exam ples of a common front being presented. Part of the explanation for this lies undoubtedly in the inevitable 'turf' politics, personality differences and competition for funding that afflict such organizations. At the same time, however, there are more substantive differences that divide local NGOs. The most obvious of these would be the specialization of each organization on a specific set of issues, but groups also fall into separate camps with regard to their relationship with state authorities, as noted earlier. While these factors have tended to keep organizations operating largely independently, specific causes have brought them together. The most notable example of this has been the campaign to prevent inappropriate development on Penang Hill.

'Penang Hill' refers to the range of hills that rise sharply to the west of Georgetown on Penang Island, reaching a peak of 830 metres. From the top, reached by a funicular railway or along forest trails, visitors enjoy magnificent views of the city and the surrounding hills. On 1 September 1990, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by then Chief Minister Lim Chong Eu and the managing director of Berjaya Corporation, Vincent Tan. The MOU outlined a plan for the development of Penang Hill by Bukit Pinang Leisure Sdn. Bhd., a subsidiary of Berjaya. The plan involved 900 acres of land—much of it in, or close to, forest reserves and water catchment areas—to be developed for a variety of commercial and recreational facilities. These included: a waterworld complex, a

cable car, two large hotels, a condominium, an adventure park, a golf course, and a sports, shopping and entertainment complex.

The announcement was greeted with surprise and dismay by many in Penang. The planned development had not been through any process of public consultation or debate. Even many legislators and government officials were apparently unaware of the proposal. The ecological, hydrological and geomorphological impact of the proposed project on the relatively undeveloped and tranquil hilltop area led to the formation of concerted opposition to the plan.

A number of non-governmental groups and individuals—both local and national—banded together to form the 'Friends of Penang Hill' (FOPH). In this way, an informal network of diverse civil society organizations was created around a specific issue. The network included: CAP (Consumers' Association of Penang), the Malaysian Nature Society, Sahabat Alam Malaysia, the Environmental Protection Society of Malaysia (EPSM), the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), the Universiti Sains Malaysia Academic and Administrative Staff Association, Aliran, the Penang State Youth Council, ABIM (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* or the Muslim Youth Movement of Maylasia), the Justice and Peace Commission, the Penang and Province Wellesley Textile Union, the Penang Mountaineering Society, the Penang Ratepayers' Association, and the Penang Heritage Trust. A core group produced a book-length study assessing the value of Penang Hill, analyzing the Berjaya proposal, and suggesting a detailed alternative plan (Friends of Penang Hill 1991). The group also produced numerous press statements and presented a strong critical voice countering the proposed development. By January 1991, almost 30,000 signatures had been collected on a petition to preserve the Hill. FOPH also successfully internationalized the campaign, with coverage of the dispute reaching as far as the *Australian Financial Review* and the *Los Angeles Times* in 1991.

In October 1990 Lim Chong Eu was replaced as Chief Minister by his political secretary Koh Tsu Koon. Lim had been forced to step down after losing his State assembly seat to DAP leader Lim Kit Siang, but the election campaign had itself revolved at least partly around the issue of the Penang Hill development. In May 1991, following public pressure, Berjaya's environmental impact assessment (EIA) was rejected by the Federal Department of Environment (DoE) and a revised and slightly scaled-down plan was then submitted for public debate and DoE approval. This too was rejected in January 1992 and the entire plan was then shelved.

In the light of the Berjaya affair, Chief Minister Koh ordered the State's Town and Country Planning Department to draft a Penang Hill Local Plan that would propose developmental directions for the area in keeping with the environmental context and public opinion. The Plan was unveiled in March 1997 and allowed for a variety of hotel developments, as well as retail areas, a visitor centre and ecotourism facilities. The Plan has yet to be implemented on the ground, despite the urging of a federal minister for Culture, Arts and Tourism in June 1999 that the State government should develop the Hill 'as soon as possible' (*New Straits*

Times, 11 June 1999:9). While Penang Hill has so far escaped redevelopment, such ministerial statements suggest that the issue may eventually be broached again. In addition, a challenge to Koh Tsu Koon's leadership of the State Gerakan party in May 1999 was rumoured to have been supported by parties with an interest in the project and backed by Vincent Tan of Berjaya. One of Koh's most vociferous critics within the State Gerakan party was the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce President and former Party Vice-Chairman Tan Kok Pin. Tan had been executive director of Bukit Pinang Leisure Sdn. Bhd. and owned 29 per cent of the company (*New Straits Times,* 31 January 1999: 2). While Koh won re-election to the leadership, some interpret Tan's challenge as a warning from powerful interests that do not wish to be impeded in their plans. The Friends of Penang Hill network is now dormant, but those involved continue to monitor developments and are prepared to reactivate the opposition alliance if inappropriate development proposals for the Hill should again emerge.

The FOPH case illustrates some important themes concerning the political spaces in which civil society organizations were working. Firstly, the controversy brought together diverse groups from the Nature Society to the Trade Union movement in a network that transcended their specific terms of reference or concerns. Such diverse groups also spoke to very different constituencies, from middle class English-speaking urbanites in the former to working class factory operators, often from rural areas, in the latter. The impressive size of the signed petition illustrates its grassroots reach. This 'network' space of politics both strengthened the opposition as various talents and perspectives could be brought to bear on the subject, but it also diffused any sense that 'minority interests' or questionable motives were driving the campaign. It is easier to discredit an individual critic than to undermine a broad-based and well-informed campaign.[2]

The second point to make is that the network was not simply local, but also extended to organizations with a national scale of operations, such as the Environmental Protection Society of Malaysia and ABIM. For a developer operating with substantial political influence at the national level, it was undoubtedly crucial that the oppositional struggle should also be elevated to the national arena.

Finally, the network of linkages in the FOPH campaign was broadened to an international scale. While international linkages may sometimes be a hindrance to effective political organization in the Malaysian context, the international publicity that campaigns such as the FOPH receive undoubtedly registers their complaints at the highest level of the federal government.

The formation of such a network, while rare, illustrates a potent source of strength for critical civil society organizations. While each operates within stringent regulatory limitations on its own specific set of concerns, when an issue emerged that could unite diverse groups around a common cause, a substantial success was achieved. The implication would seem to be that the political space of individual organizations can be multiplied through networking to create an effective oppositional front to a specific developmental programme.

The conditions for political space: accounting for civil society in Penang

The handful of organizations described above exemplifies what is, in comparison with other states in Malaysia, a relatively strong associational life in Penang. The island may not be a hotbed of oppositional politics but it has spawned an unusually rich group of organizations seeking to advance a critical and reformist agenda. To the extent that Penang does stand out in the national context in this respect, it illustrates the spatial variability of state power and spaces for civil society formation around it. It is therefore worthwhile identifying some tentative factors that might account for this.

The first characteristic to be noted is that social organization beyond formal governmental structures, and a certain level of liberalism, have long been a part of life in Penang. The State was the site of the Penang Free School, founded in 1816. The first English-medium school in Southeast Asia, it subsequently developed a strong educational tradition, allowing the transfer of liberal Western ideas on issues such as human rights, consumer rights and environmentalism. Equally, Penang was also an early centre for Islamic scholarship in Southeast Asia, which tied it to another cosmopolitan sphere of intellectual influences. Prior to colonialism, as a largely immigrant society, early settlers also formed clan houses *(kongsi),* trade guilds and mutual aid groups to assist members of their own community—based on place of origin, language, ethnicity and religion. Over 500 such organizations have existed at one time or another in Penang, providing medical assistance, financial aid and other support. While it would be tempting to trace the vitality of social organization in Penang to this source, the more active contemporary movements in fact share little common lineage with these older organizations. Indeed the prominent organizations described above define themselves in explicitly inter-communal terms. It might, however, be reasonably claimed that a tradition of social organization and involvement has long existed on the island, and that a settlement society based on extra-local linkages and without the historically feudal social formations elsewhere in Malaya, provided fertile ground for more liberal approaches to governance and the public sphere.

A second factor in Penang's contemporary political complexion might also be the relatively sympathetic context provided by the State's political leadership. The Chief Minister Koh Tsu Koon is himself a former leader in the State's non-governmental sector, having been an official of CAP and a lecturer at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Unlike many Malaysian politicians, he is considered to be relatively free of the business interests that have elsewhere frequently guided policy decisions. In the example of the Penang Hill dispute as described earlier, Koh stopped development plans in the face of pressure from a coalition of local NGOs. In recent years too, channels have been provided for policy inputs from civil society. One example that warrants some elaboration is the Sustainable Penang Initiative (SPI).

In 1997 the State government established the Socio-Economic and Environmental Research Institute (SERI) as an 'independent' think-tank for research and long-term strategic planning and policy formulation. In late 1997, SERI launched SPI, with funding from the Canadian government and UN agencies, to establish a process for greater public participation in defining goals for development planning.

Between November 1997 and September 1998, the SPI initiated a series of roundtables on issues relating to the State's future development. The roundtables discussed, in turn, ecological sustainability, social justice, economic productivity, cultural vibrancy and popular participation. Conscious that these events had drawn a largely middle class audience that was fluent in English, two further roundtables, this time conducted in Malay and Mandarin respectively, were conducted in October 1998 and January 1999, though both were poorly attended. The SPI describes itself as a 'community-level sustainability indicators project' and each roundtable was designed to precipitate issues of concern that small groups of participants would then discuss in order to develop a vision statement and indicators that could be used to gauge the sustainability of Penang's development.

Participation in the roundtables was by invitation of SERI/SPI and each session attracted individuals from government, NGOs, business, industry, professional associations and academia. The vast majority, however, were drawn from research and academic institutions or NGOs. The SPI represented a unique exercise in participatory governance by a Malaysian state. The roundtables were supported and even on occasion attended by the Chief Minister and the State Executive Councillor for Economic Planning. Several members of the SPI steering committee also made presentations of the results to small groups of senior State government officials.

From the point of view of the participants, many regarded the roundtables as excellent opportunities for networking with other NGOs and airing a range of pressing concerns. Nevertheless, many also remained sceptical about the long-term significance of the process in fostering popular participation in and influence over development planning. These concerns also address the broader relationship between the State government and civil society. The first question concerns the extent to which middle class, urban, English-speaking advocates can genuinely speak for a mass base of rural or working class Penangites (for comparison see Chapters 2 and 4). Based on direct representation or experience, clearly they cannot. But civil society leaders, through channels such as the SPI, do provide an alternative voice and thus expand the political space within the State.

The real effectiveness of such participation is the second question. Many participants in the SPI argued that the issues discussed remained relatively innocuous, focusing for example on essentially middle class concerns about environmental *quality,* such as air pollution, rather than more fundamental questions of environmental *sustainability*. In addition, specific contentious issues such as proposals for a third link between the island and the mainland were never

even on the agenda. Thus, while the State has permitted an airing for alternative voices, it has also limited the agenda that they may address.

Finally, despite the apparent openness of the State government to such broad public input, other demands and pressures may ultimately have a stronger influence. The private sector lobby within the State is one obvious example, but another is the centralized power of the Malaysian federal government which exercises direct control over many aspects of State-level development. Few specific powers for long term planning, aside from land use regulations, reside with the Penang State government. Moreover controls over the formation of civil society organizations, permissions to hold meetings and so on, also come under federal jurisdiction with little power accorded to individual states.

Attributing Penang's relatively active civil society entirely to contemporary political tolerance would therefore seem misguided—not least because most of the prominent organizations described earlier trace their origins to the 1970s when the much less sympathetic Chief Minister Lim Chong Eu was in control. A third and more enduring aspect of Penang's political scene is the distinctive ethnic balance that makes it the only state in which Malays, or others categorized as *Bumiputera,* are not a majority. Thus, the Chinese population forms an anomalous enclaved majority on the island of Penang. For this reason, along with its geographical remoteness from the metropolitan core, Penang's politics has often marched to a different beat. Until 1972, when the State's Gerakan Party formally joined the National Front coalition, the State legislature was controlled by opposition parties (until 1969, this was in the form of opposition socialists). Similarly, until the abolition of elected local government in the State in the early 1970s and its replacement with appointed officials, the city of Georgetown was also held by opposition parties. Even now, with its roots in democratic socialism and its largely Chinese support base, Gerakan remains a junior partner and marginal player in the ruling coalition at the national level. It might be argued therefore that Penang's lack of Malay party political hegemony, and a background of less than firm political allegiance to the core, have created conditions conducive to independent and critical social movements.

A final point worth noting is the active role played in civil society organizations by faculty, former faculty and graduates of the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang. While Penang was historically a rival for Kuala Lumpur as an educational centre, Kuala Lumpur emerged in the post-colonial era as Malaysia's predominant administrative and educational hub. As a result, Penang has developed a more liminal identity in intellectual terms, in some ways comparable to Salatiga as discussed in Chapter 2. While scholars in Kuala Lumpur are better connected to the sources of funding, consultancies and political influence, some would argue that those in Penang have been left with more space for intellectual pursuits and social activism. Nevertheless, this factor too should not be overstated —USM is far from being a hotbed of radicalism and the contemporary student body is largely politically inert.

Indonesia: centralized and coercive authoritarianism

The structural conditions for alternative political space in Indonesia have been quite different from those created by the bureaucratic authoritarianism of Malaysia. More than three decades of Suharto's New Order created an environment in which the state's capacity to repress, neutralize, or co-opt opposition was highly developed. Power was increasingly centralized with the President and in Jakarta while the military remained closely involved in many aspects of economic and political life. Added to this was the brutal suppression of alternative political voices in the late 1960s and the continued buttressing of state power through violent coercion. The result has been, until the tumultuous changes of the late 1990s, an authoritarian context characterized by centralization and coercive repression.

In this context civil society organizations have been forced to adopt a highly localized and apolitical stance while avoiding controversial macropolitical issues (Eldridge 1995). Nevertheless, Eldridge argues that NGOs did create within the New Order framework a more pluralistic political landscape by the late 1980s (see also Aspinall 1996). But such pluralism, certainly until the fall of the New Order in 1998–9, was calibrated, with NGOs treading a careful line lest they be branded subversive. Indeed the label *non*-governmental organization (*Organisasi Non-Pemerintah,* or ORNOP) ceased to be widely used by the mid-1980s as it was perceived to imply '*anti*-government'. Instead, NGOs were labelled LSM (*Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat* or self-reliant community institutions) or LPSM (*Lembaga Pengembangan Swadaya Masyarakat* or institutions for developing community self-reliance). Both were in keeping with the dominant ideology of 'Pancasila' democracy, implying small-scale self-help activities or at least projects in keeping with the government's agenda. It is in this broader context that the political space for civil society formation on Batam must be considered.

Batam: peripheral hub of Indonesian capitalism

While Penang's development was starting to accelerate in the early 1970s, Batam was still a sparsely inhabited island of fishing communities with a population of around 6,000 located in the Riau archipelago just south of Singapore (and about 1.5 hours flying time from Jakarta). In 1971, a Master Plan for Batam Island was devised by the state oil company Pertamina with a view to developing an oil and gas exploration base and downstream processing activities on the island. It was only in 1973, however, that industrial areas were designated on Batam. In 1974, a customs-free bonded zone was created on the island and the Batam Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) was established. Only following these developments was broader industrial development mooted. Designated by BIDA as 'The Preparation Period', this period lasted until 1976 (BIDA 1999).

'The Preparation Period' was followed by a two-year 'Consolidation Period' but it was in 1978 that Batam's political and economic significance was confirmed.

Then the entire island was designated as a bonded zone in order to encourage export-oriented industries and B.J. Habibie took over the chairmanship of BIDA. This was BIDA's self-proclaimed 'Infrastructure Development and Capital Investment Period' and lasted until Habibie stepped down to assume the Indonesian Vice-Presidency in March 1998. These twenty years saw phenomenal changes on the island with the official population growing almost tenfold from 31, 800 in 1978 to 266,428 by December 1998. There is reason to believe that even this figure is a vast underestimate given the numbers of unrecorded migrants arriving daily on the island from all parts of the Indonesian archipelago. Senior BIDA officials estimate that the total may be as high as 500,000 with 1,000–2,000 new arrivals disembarking every week.

Over the same twenty-year period, the island's registered workforce grew from a few thousand to over 140,000 with an imbalance towards women who represented 56 per cent of the total. The greater number of women provides some indication of the gendered division of labour that exists in the island's industrial estates. The largest of these, Batamindo, is an Indonesia-Singaporean joint venture between the Salim Group of Indonesia and the government-linked Singapore Technologies (now Sembcorp Industries) and Jurong Town Corporation. Located on 320 hectares at Muka Kuning in the heart of the island, Batamindo employed just over 64,500 workers by the end of 1998, half of them accommodated in dormitories within the estate. Clearly, given Batam's low population two decades ago, nearly all of these workers were migrants from elsewhere in Indonesia. Most of the workforce is accounted for by manufacturing (75 per cent), construction (10 per cent) and the leisure industry (7 per cent) (BIDA 1999).

Two distinctive characteristics lie behind Batam's development. The first is a unique administrative structure in which BIDA rather than the local municipal or provincial governments controls all development planning on the island. The Chairman of BIDA reports directly to the President and thus bypasses intermediate levels of authority. The result is that development on the island has been explicitly directed towards the needs of foreign capital locating in industrial estates, while social concerns have assumed only secondary importance (Peachey 1998). A second dimension of Batam's development is its proximity to Singapore. As such, foreign investors located 'high-end' operations in the latter while labour intensive production facilities were displaced to Batam's low-cost industrial estates. This arrangement was given governmental recognition in 1989 through the SIJORI 'growth triangle' that sought to bring the Riau islands, the State of Johor in Malaysia and Singapore into a unified regional economy (Parsonage 1992). Industrial investment thus took off on Batam in the 1990s with Singapore-based capital at the forefront of the process.

Rapid development on Batam has transformed the island's physical and social landscape. Forests across the island have been razed to make way for new commercial centres, residential estates, tourist resorts and industrial areas. While some migrants, particularly those brought in on temporary contracts to work in the Batamindo industrial estate, are accommodated in workers' dormitories, many

more live in squatter settlements on land that has been cleared of forest but undeveloped (Peachey 1998). In addition to a constant stream of migrant workers, the island also received over 1 million tourist arrivals in 1998. Many of these visitors were Singaporeans, and Batam has developed a 'leisure economy' to supply their needs. For some, this means the resort development on the northeastern coast of the island, for others the sex industry in Nagoya (Batam's commercial centre)—the source of a growing incidence of HIV/AIDS.

Batam is undoubtedly one of Indonesia's 'frontiers' of development. Even during the economic crisis of 1997–9, investment in the island continued to grow and migrants arrived, drawn by the prospects of employment and fleeing from conflict-ridden parts of the country (BIDA 1999). Despite the profound social and environmental transformations that these continuing changes wrought, the role of civil society in shaping or resisting the process of development was very limited.

Civil society on Batam

Whereas Penang has a relatively well-developed civil society, on Batam the converse prevails. Notwithstanding the island's much smaller population (about a third of Penang's), Batam's civil society is relatively truncated and takes a quite different form. This is despite the very evident and pressing consequences of rapid urban and industrial development that afflict the island.

Most of the organizations that do exist on Batam are small, poorly funded and limited in scope. There are few, if any, that bear resemblance to the secular advocacy organizations so prominent in Penang. One identifiable group of organizations focuses on public service provision. These are the organizations that would be categorized as LSM as noted above. In 1999 there were twenty-four such organizations registered with the local office of the Department of Social Affairs (DEPSOS). Registration is not a legal requirement but such organizations tended to do so in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the authorities and to be eligible for the very limited funds available from DEPSOS. Almost all of these organizations were classified by DEPSOS as 'embryonic'—meaning that they are small and highly localized—and most provide some sort of social service such as welfare, adoption programmes, playgroups, elderly support networks, Muslim schools or education and health care among sex workers. In all cases then, these organizations are engaged in activities that fill the gaps left by inadequate social services from governmental authorities. They focused on service delivery rather than critical advocacy or activism regarding these issues. Six of the twenty-four organizations concentrated on working among those with HIV/AIDS and emerged in order to tap funds being directed at the issue by the World Bank and other international organizations. They were thus as much a response to a funding source as a response to a problem.

Many LSMs on Batam were coordinated by the KKKS *(Koordinator Kegiatan Kesejahteraan Sosial)* which, while technically independent of the government, is also part of the hierarchy of coordinating bodies that stretches up to the

provincial and national levels. Perhaps more pertinently, several of these organizations, including the office of the KKKS, were in the late 1990s under the direct control of Ibu Soedarsono, the younger sister of former President B.J. Habibie. Limited funds are received from the government, but the coordinator also accesses external sources—including World Bank funds for HIV/AIDS projects. Importantly, few if any of Batam's LSMs operate beyond Batam.

Youth groups *(karang taruna)* exist in almost every village through which youths (aged 10–24) organize village projects, social activities and sporting events. Larger villages and urban centres have youth groups that belong to the *Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia* (National Committee of Indonesian Youth). These and other youth organizations are, however, government-initiated with funding for specific projects coming from BIDA, the Batam Municipality and private companies.

For all of the organizations described thus far, however, the emphasis is on service provision rather than advocacy or activism for social and political change. In just two areas—environmentalism and labour rights—has there been some evidence of a limited move away from these apolitical or government-initiated groups and towards a wider reformist agenda. Each illustrates a different civil society formation, adapted to the contours of the Indonesian political landscape.

Corporate society

Corporate civil society forms a limited but potentially important element of alternative social power on Batam. Such is the importance of industry to the island that it is difficult for authorities to ignore the voice of corporate investors, especially those foreign businesses who drive the island's economy. Two business associations have emerged in Batam specifically to address environmental issues.

The first, BILIK *(Bina Lingkungan Daerah Industri Pulau Batam),* hardly comes under the rubric of civil society at all, having been established as a non-profit organization in November 1996 through a decree from the Chief Executive of BIDA. The impetus to create the organization came after instances of chemical spillage on Batam but more specifically from multinational corporations demanding that their suppliers or subsidiaries achieve ISO 14000 certification for environmental management. BILIK was intended to be a forum for communication between corporate stakeholders and a channel for consciousness-raising on issues relating to environmental conservation. Issues addressed by the group include hazardous waste management and erosion control. The organization's membership in 1999 consisted of thirty-three companies (mostly multinational investors) and its activities included seminars, training sessions and a regular bulletin to facilitate information exchange between members on environmental management issues. Support for these events has come from membership fees, as well as external donors, such as the Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany, and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). In addition to the group's local activities, members also participated in workshops in the USA

(through the US-Asia Environmental Partnership, or USAEP) and at the Regional Institute of Environmental Technology (RIET) in Singapore.

Despite the evident need for environmental concerns to be addressed, BILIK faced a lukewarm reception. Some misinterpreted its purpose and assumed that their membership fee would be used to provide a 'clean-up' or environmental trouble-shooting service. Those involved complain that even the group's own board members lacked commitment to developing the orga nization and members showed little enthusiasm for events. Available funds were insufficient even to employ a full-time coordinator. As a result, by mid-1999 BILIK was petering out with no further events planned.

While BILIK withered, another organization, Green Link, emerged with an environmental agenda. Unlike BILIK, the latter is an independent organization without formal government linkages and without a membership base. While Green Link defines its 'stakeholders' more broadly than BILIK to include government bodies, other environmental NGOs, research organizations and consultants, once again it is private industry and not the 'public' that features most prominently. The role of the organization is envisaged primarily as one of liaison between government and industry and between outside environmental organizations and local companies. Green Link's network apparently extends beyond Batam to Jakarta, and to NGOs in the UK and the USA. The organization is still very much in its formative stages, however, with just three core activists and representatives from the various 'stakeholder' sectors. The group plans to access funds from international sources, including UNEP and USAEP. Issues to be addressed are waste management, environmental technologies and corporate environmental management systems—essentially the same brand of technocratic environmentalism as BILIK.

These corporate environmental groups indicate some of the limitations on civil society formation in Batam. Broader society—'the public'—tends not to be counted as a stakeholder in such organizations, which have limited their activities to corporate and technocratic environmentalism. Within the corporate constituency to which these activities are addressed, there appears to be very limited enthusiasm, except among a committed minority. Moreover, the agenda of such organizations appears to be driven at least in part by the commercial imperatives of member companies (e.g. transfer of environmental technology, certification under ISO 14000 for marketing purposes, etc.). This imperative also applies more broadly in Batam where it appears that the developing areas of civil society are those that can attract funding from international agencies and foundations. Thus the issues validated as important are being defined (not necessarily incorrectly) from the outside.

Religion and labour rights

The level of unionization among workers on Batam has been low, reflecting restrictions on formal labour organization under the New Order at both national

and local levels (see Hadiz 1997, and Chapter 4 in this book). Only the state-approved SPSI *(Serikat Perkerja Seluruh Indonesia)* has had any presence in Batam until recently. There are, however, several organizations that have emerged in recent years to address concerns among the burgeoning industrial workforce. The first is a Christian-based welfare and counselling centre for female industrial workers that also engages in advocacy on their behalf. The second is a youth mosque catering to workers in the Batamindo industrial estate, but providing little in the way of independent representation for workers. The third is an independent trade union organization that has only recently been able to organize workers on Batam but looks likely to expand its activities in the future. The purpose in highlighting these three sites within civil society is that they demonstrate the important role that religious organizations have played in maintaining a space for civil society in Indonesia, and yet such organizations have the potential to play a repressive rather than a reformist role. At the same time, a changing political environment has allowed the entry of independent trade unionism, previously unheard of on Batam.

Pusat Pelayanan Nakerwan di Batam (PPNB, Women Workers' Service Centre), established in December 1996, is a Christian organization under the auspices of the *Persatuan Gereja-Gereja Indonesia* (PGI, Indonesian Council of Churches). Batam was chosen as the site for this project by PGI because of its importance both as a destination for the internal labour migration of female workers and as a launching point for overseas workers going to Singapore and Malaysia. The main function of the centre is to provide counselling for both local employees and prospective or returning overseas workers on issues related to working conditions, health, legal rights and job hunting. The PPNB will not, however, intervene directly in disputes between workers and employers. The Centre also provides a shelter for workers escaping abusive employment situations and engages in advocacy work on behalf of such workers. Current issues in Batam's industrial sector include the temporary and insecure nature of contracts under which most workers are employed, poor working conditions and inadequate pay, the deleterious health effects of production line work, and the denial of women's rights where pregnancy or marriage can lead to dismissal. Funding for the organization comes in part from PGI's Jakarta headquarters, which in turn is partly supported by a Dutch Christian organization. PPNB, however, is heavily dependent on volunteers and remains short of funds. While the main PPNB Centre is in Nagoya, a second counselling centre in a port and industrial area at Sekupang was closed due to lack of funds. The Centre maintained links with migrant worker NGOs in the receiving countries and is currently seeking funds from overseas agencies. It was also linked to local NGOs that worked on health issues, particularly those addressing HIV/AIDS issues.

Another neligious-based organization for workers was provided by the 'youth mosque' (*Remaja Mesjid Nurul Islam,* RMNI) at the Batamindo Industrial Estate. Well over half of Batamindo's workforce was Muslim and until 1993, religious activities at the industrial estate were organized around a *mushollah* (a common

area for the performance of religious duties) in the workers' dormitories. Subsequently, the activities became formalized into the youth mosque, opened by B.J.Habibie and affiliated with his ICMI (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*. Association of Muslim Intellectuals of Indonesia). At least part of the impetus for this development came from firms inside the estate and the mosque followed by organizing activities inside most factories. Indeed, every company was expected to have a Quranic recitation group for its workers. The mosque thus has a firm-level network of organizations and members within the estate, and a monopoly on the organization of Islamic activities for workers. Ultimately, however, the organizers of the mosque's activities declared themselves to be 'under', and answerable to, the Batamindo management, which was keen to maintain close control over all activities within the estate. The religious nature of the mosque is thus ambiguous, or perhaps more accurately, the secular nature of the Batamindo management also extends to the workers' spiritual lives.

In addition to religious activities, the mosque also organized sporting and social events, orientations, courses and 'how-to' workshops on being a good mother, father or housewife (the latter reflecting the fact that many workers will stay for just a couple of years before returning home to start a family). While the mosque has no formal role in industrial relations, it became involved in instances where religious observance affects the workplace—for example in the observance of fasting during Ramadan. However, the mosque has also been careful that those workers who are identified with it should be perceived as good and reliable workers and certainly did not neglect its role as provider of moral guidance for workers, even where this strays into secular matters, Employees are thus discouraged from job-hopping or leaving their jobs without notice. Combined with the mosque's close relationship with Batamindo, this means that its role was far removed from that of a workers' advocacy organization. On the contrary, its function was perhaps better read as a form of spiritual discipline over the workforce.

While the SPSI was the only formal union presence in Batam for most of the island's rapid development, in December 1995 the SBSI *(Serikat Buruh Seluruh Indonesia)* established a branch in Batam. SBSI was founded in 1992 by Muchtar Pakpahan who was subsequently jailed from 1994 to 1998, when he was released by President Habibie. It was only after Pakpahan's release that SBSI was granted the status of a legal labour organization. By that time, its presence at an informal level was already well established in Batam, where a local organizer had gradually worked to raise awareness of the working population concerning labour issues and rights and providing training in procedures for industrial action and negotiation. The island has not, however, been a hospitable environment for unions, with outright hostility from many employers and occasional intervention from security forces. The Batamindo management is reportedly less resistant although hardly encouraging. Workers too were reluctant to become involved in union activities, fearful of retribution and unfamiliar with the concepts of labour rights. Even by 1999, Batam's SBSI branch had active members in only about ten

companies. Despite this low level of unionization, in several cases workers in particular factories organized strike actions over specific issues without the involvement of the SBSI. Grievances were heightened after 1997, as wages did not keep up with the rising cost of living and workers found themselves without the means to provide for their basic needs.

Limitations on political space in Batam

Examples from the labour movement and environmental organizations highlight the embryonic nature of civil society formation in Batam. Several factors can be highlighted that offer explanations for the limited alternative political space on the island.

The first is the demographic and socio-economic composition of the island. A tiny proportion of the island's population was born there, while hundreds of thousands have arrived in just the last two decades. Many of these labour migrants have come on fixed contracts with the intention of returning to their home villages (mostly on Sumatra and Java) when they have saved some money. The population is thus highly transient and without a long-term commitment to the place. A sense of *anomie* prevails. As one interviewee put it, the prevalent attitude is *'jangan saling menganggu* [don't bother each other]'. Their sojourn in Batam is focused purely on employment. Many would describe their time in Batam away from their home *kampung* as *'merantau',* a word connoting a search for adventure, self-identity and success. Their move to Batam is thus a particular part of their life plan that is seldom considered permanent. As one interviewee noted: 'the atmosphere on Batam is work and work and work only'. Their purposes would usually not extend to building a more liveable physical and social environment. Moreover, many have been recruited and brought to the island by a company contracted by Batamindo to supply labour to the industrial estate. In this way, and through organizations such as the youth mosque, their behaviour is closely monitored and controlled. They are thus reluctant to risk unemployment or religious disapproval. It is also worth noting that workers in Batam have a lot to lose. Many face shame if they return to their home villages without accumulated capital, and earnings in Batam are relatively high—in April 1999 minimum wages across Indonesia were raised and Batam's remained the highest in the country at 290,000 rupiah per month (approximately US$40 at 1999 exchange rates). To lose this income through unwise social or political involvement would be devastating for the individuals concerned.

A second related dimension of Batam's rapid growth that has militated against the formation of civil society organizations is the pervasiveness of squatter housing. Without formal title to their homes, many of Batam's residents perceive their social rights to be tenuous and are unwilling to assert them. In a few instances, resistance to eviction has precipitated *ad hoc* residents' organizations, but in general the transience of accommodation, like the transience of life in Batam more

generally, serves to undermine any motivation towards civic involvement (Peachey 1998).

A third important dimension of life in Batam is the island's administrative set-up. Although the island is technically a part of Batam Municipality which is responsible for most social programmes, many local decision-making powers such as land use are abrogated to BIDA. The latter, in turn, is answerable to the President alone with little formal accountability at the local level. In this way, the development of the island has been dictated by a national agenda, but the social and environmental consequences of that development have been left for an ill-equipped local government to deal with. A part of that national agenda has been to discourage civil society formation, particularly where such groups might encroach upon politically sensitive terrain. Thus it has only been since 1998 that independent trade union organizations have been able to work openly on Batam. Perhaps significantly, Batam also lacked a student population to challenge the political status quo, and thus the island was without this politically catalytic component which has had an important role elsewhere in the country as exemplified in Chapters 2, 6 and 7.

A less formal dimension of Batam's administrative structure has been the degree to which the Habibie family has dominated the island. When Habibie stepped down as head of BIDA, his brother Junus (nicknamed 'Fanny') replaced him before stepping down two months later in an atmosphere hostile to such nepotism. However, as *Asiaweek* noted in 1998, the family remained heavily involved in Batam:

> Ilham [Habibie's son] still works at the state aircraft company his father once ran, and with his younger brother, Thareq, plus an aunt, has a joint venture to build a $100-million resort on Batam. Thareq's group is involved in a Natuna oilfield and in a Batam hotel with a cousin. Habibie's youngest brother, Timmy, is boss of the Timsco conglomerate, the family's biggest company. Timsco, linked to Suharto crony companies, is planning a $1-billion container terminal on Batam, where Timmy's wife operates a taxi monopoly. (Doubtless some projects are likely to be hit by the woeful economy.) Habibie's younger sister, Sri Rejeki [Ibu Soedarsono], chairs a foundation that runs the island's hospitals and schools. Her husband is a former BIDA CEO and still holds the exclusive right to manage Batam's ports. Habibie's elder brother, Satoto, once possessed the sole contract to clean the tankers docking at Batam.
>
> (*Asiaweek,* 4 June 1998)

In addition, PT Batamindo Investment Corporation, while involving major shareholdings by Singaporean government-linked corporations, is also partly controlled by PT Herwindo Rintas, a company whose owners include Habibie's younger brother Timmy, and Suharto's son, Bambang. The relations between Batam's development and national government power structures are therefore

more than simply institutional. The result has been BIDA's and Batamindo's unquestioned power to develop the island according to a vision devised without the input of local residents and where their role is largely limited to providing factory labour. As a result, civil society has been given little room to develop within the island's power structure.

Even among those service-based civil society organizations that do exist, the former President's family plays a key role. In 1999, Habibie's younger sister, Ibu Soedarsono ran four NGOs with operations in Batam, covering a range of welfare issues such as adoption, counselling and health care for sex workers, youth organizations, together with hospital and school foundations. As noted earlier, she was also the head of the coordinating office for LSM on Batam, while her husband, retired Major-General Darmosoewito Soedarsono (formerly Habibie's deputy at BIDA), was chairman of the Batam Indonesia Red Cross. To have such well-connected individuals engaged in philanthropic work is of course welcome, and undoubtedly created conditions in which action could be taken quickly and efficiently. But a side-effect of powerful involvement in Batam's few NGOs was the utilization of available funds by those with connections, with little left for smaller organizations.

Regime change and prospects for civil society on Batam

While a variety of factors limited the space for civil society on Batam, some dimensions of change do provide grounds for optimism. Several reflect the way in which the changing political environment at the national level filtered through to Batam.

First, both BIDA and the Batam Municipality placed greater emphasis on the social dimensions of the island's industrial development. The successor to Habibie's brother as chairman of BIDA in July 1998 was Ismeth Abdullah who initiated a self-styled epoch entitled 'The Extension Development of Batam with Focus on Social Development and Investment Climate Improvement' (BIDA 1999). One of Ismeth's first actions was to establish a Directorate for Resettlement, Manpower and Social Development in December 1998. This was apparently a political decision made in Jakarta reflecting changing national priorities. While social issues may now be a more explicit component of BIDA's agenda, the authority has not, however, necessarily embraced the concept of public participation in development planning in practical terms. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of social concern in the BIDA planning apparatus was a promising start and many seemed to believe that the authority's new chairman was genuine in his commitment to such issues.

The Batam Municipal Government's *(Pemerintah Daerah Batam)* Department of Social Affairs (DEPSOS) has also displayed an increasingly sympathetic attitude towards the existence and involvement of NGOs. Indeed, one of the section heads at DEPSOS has recently established a new independent NGO, *Suarindo,* which like several existing NGOs seeks to address issues related to

health, education, prostitution and HIV/AIDS. Indonesia's Regional Autonomy Law of 1999 promised that such local responsiveness might be strengthened, as districts and municipalities (such as Batam) were given greater autonomy, authority and resources. Since 2001, however, the Megawati administration has been engaged in moves to revise the law, reflecting its imperative to retain a unitary state with strong central control. In any case, some critics have argued that regional autonomy would simply open the way to many local authoritarianisms and money politics, rather than a more responsive, equitable and democratic system.

The second source of optimism, also reflecting changing national circumstances, was the emergence of new organizations on Batam. The presence of the recently legalized union movement SBSI provided a higher level of advocacy on labour issues. Green Link, while remaining a largely technocratic and corporate environmental movement, was nevertheless attempting to place such issues on the agenda of policy makers and corporate decisionmakers. The organization could well expand to address a wider range of environmental issues.

Conclusion

Case studies from Penang and Batam provide contrasting experiences of civil society formation and suggest some conditions for social organization in national peripheries. Both islands have seen rapid development based primarily on their attractiveness to foreign investment as a result of a heavily constrained union movement, the internal migration of a cheap labour force and a local and national regulatory framework closely attuned to the needs of foreign capital. It is here, however, that the similarities stop. The nature of social organization on the two islands presents some stark contrasts. While Penang is home to some of Malaysia's highest profile and most influential secular advocacy organizations, development on Batam has proceeded with an almost complete absence of such influences. Identifying a series of differences between the two contexts goes some way towards an explanation for this contrasting experience.

First, Penang's tradition of social organization through the formal groups that aided new migrants to the island over the last few centuries finds only an embryonic equivalent in Batam. Such mutual help does exist in Batam as ethno-linguistic communities have assisted people migrating from their home regions, but this does not appear to have translated into the more formalized institutions of Penang. Second, Chinese communities in Penang have historically created a stronger tendency for alternative politics in the face of ethnic Malay party political dominance at the national level, though one could equally argue that in the late 1990s alternative political voices were emerging more strongly from within the Malay rather than Chinese communities. Meanwhile, although equally peripheral in physical terms, Batam enjoys no such liminality with respect to national politics. Third, and related, the institutions of governance in each context are quite different. While Penang's development is managed by the elected State government, albeit within highly circumscribed limits set by federal jurisdiction,

Batam's industrial and urban expansion has been directed by an unelected authority that answers directly to the President. There have, therefore, been many more opportunities for civil society organizations to intervene in the development process in Penang than in Batam. Fourth, the presence of Universiti Sains Malaysia and other educational institutions in Penang has created both a relatively liberal intellectual atmosphere and a socially engaged community of students and faculty members. Batam lacked any such presence. Fifth, the presence of a stable and developed middle class in Penang created both a demand for, and participants in, social movements to address issues relating to developmental priorities and directions. Batam, meanwhile, is a predominantly working class island and, importantly, comprises a transient population, many of whom stay for just a few years. Such conditions are hardly conducive to the formation of an engaged civil society.

These contrasting circumstances in the two locations also highlight a more general point. Within their national contexts both Batam and Penang are in some senses anomalous. Penang exhibits a far more active and open political environment than many other Malaysian states, while Batam's nascent civil society must count among the least developed in Indonesia. This highlights the geographical variability in civil society formation within national contexts. Far from being monolithic, state power and responses to it are textured rather than homogeneous across national space.

Moreover, the nature of the civil society formations described in each context indicates the varied responses that are possible in different constructions of national state power. Under Malaysia's bureaucratic authoritarianism, three responses were noted: critical collaboration, cultivating alternative consciousness and NGO networking. The latter strategy seems to be especially important. In Penang the 'reach' of the networks of civil society organizations is crucial in two senses. First, 'horizontal' networking with other organizations has, in specific instances, created conditions for significant successes on the part of civil society groups. The most notable of these successes was the Penang Hill campaign in which nearly all of the major secular NGOs in Penang were involved. When an issue attracts such a broad-based reaction from across the political spectrum, its momentum becomes very difficult for decision-makers to resist.

Second, 'vertical' networks across scales are clearly important. In Penang, the State still works within a national framework and development has been driven by the influx of foreign capital. The transfer of activism to scales beyond the local is therefore essential. Dominant powers must be met at their own scales and in their own spaces. This is where organizations such as CAP have been so successful. Equally, however, urban middle-class organizations, characterized in Penang by their use of English media, must also reach out to a grassroots support base. Here too, CAP has recorded substantial achievements. These networked spaces, then, would seem to be a key component in understanding the process of civil society formation. Attention needs to be paid not simply to the absolute space, in terms of regulatory limits, assigned to civil society, but also to both the pre-

conditions for its formation and the processes of activism that characterize a secular civil society capable of responding to and shaping developmental change.

The lack of such a political space on Batam would seem to be symptomatic of the state power formation created there. In the context of centralized and coercive state power the opportunities for coalition-building are highly circumscribed. Those civil society organizations that have emerged have tended to be apolitical welfare-oriented groups, many initiated by the government itself. Corporate civil society on the other hand, has been politically acceptable but lacking a broader reformist agenda. A more promising trend is evident in the development of religiously based movements broadening their mandate into wider social issues. This is illustrated in the case of the Christian workers' centre on Batam, though absent, unsurprisingly perhaps, in the industrial estate's 'inhouse' mosque. As the events of 1999, and the result of the presidential election in particular, suggested, religious organizations, having maintained their following and legitimacy throughout the New Order period, do hold the potential to crystallize into movements with reformist political agendas. Equally, the political space now created at the national level seems to be allowing a resurgence of secular organizations such as the trade union movement.

Notes

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1 For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that Malaysia is a federation of states. In this chapter, when reference is being made to the specific State of Penang, the word will be capitalized. Where reference is made to the Malaysian or Indonesian state or to the state apparatus in generic terms, a lower case 's' is used. Unlike Malaysia, Indonesia is not a federation and its constituent units of local government are provinces. Batam Island falls within Riau province.

2 Another example is the Malaysian Hills Network formed in January 1996 to address the issue of rapid and inappropriate development in highland areas. The Network comprises the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia, The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP), the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) and Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM). More recently, a coalition of organizations has sought to oppose the development of a second bridge link between Penang Island and the mainland, arguing instead for a comprehensive and sustainable transportation strategy for the State (Idris 2001).

4
Changing state-labour relations in Indonesia and Malaysia and the 1997 crisis

Vedi R.Hadiz

Introduction

This chapter primarily assesses state and labour relations in Indonesia, and the pressure being exerted upon the framework that has governed them since the fall of Suharto and the resultant high expectations of *Reformasi* and democratization. It places changes that are taking place in the labour area, amidst the wider processes of the restructuring of state and society relations in the aftermath of the May 1998 events that brought Suharto down and in comparison with developments in post-economic crisis Malaysia. New energies have now been poured into establishing independent unions, and even labour-based political parties,[1] signifying the unravelling of the state-dominated, authoritarian corporatist system that had been long entrenched. The focus here is on the workforces of the labour-intensive, export-oriented manufacturing sector which in the 1990s were showing increasing signs of mounting restlessness with the rise of labour disputes and independent, even if frequently informal, vehicles of organization.

While the end of Suharto's long rule has induced new hopes for the prospects of democracy in Indonesia (Budiman 1999), how labour is faring in the new environment needs to be examined, as well as whether or not these hopes are ultimately justified. Significantly, expectations of wide-ranging political change have emerged in the context of deep economic crisis. Has the crisis provided impetus or discouraged organizing activities among workers? How have the economic crisis and political events following the fall of Suharto influenced state policy toward labour? Given the concerns of this volume, historical and contemporary comparisons with the Malaysian case will be made throughout the chapter.

It is argued that workers in Indonesia are not yet able to fully exploit political openings offered by the New Order's unravelling and that this is the legacy of labour suppression since 1965, and the disorganization of civil society in general —although lower class militant movements were particularly curtailed. This argument, however, is made without developing a thesis about the essential passivity of the working class in late industrializing countries such as Indonesia. On the contrary, Indonesian workers, against all odds, have frequently gone on

strike for higher pay, better working conditions, and the recognition of the freedom to organize, especially in the 1990s. To the great consternation of state and business elites, they have apparently been oblivious to developments at the global level, which have seen the steady weakening of organized labour, although these will ultimately have a great bearing on the options available to Indonesian workers at present. Likewise, in Malaysia, where the trade union movement has been relatively non-confrontational, conflict with the government has only taken place from time to time when the interests of workers have been contradicted by state policy. However, the manifestation of this has usually been much less dramatic.

Nevertheless, Indonesian workers lacking sufficient organizational muscle and mobilizational capacities *before* the fall of Suharto, are clearly not in a position to steer *Reformasi* in a favourable direction, or to impose their agenda on contending elites currently reconstituting the framework of state and society relations. It is arguable that Malaysian workers have also been sidelined from Malaysia's own *Reformasi* struggle. The continuing marginalization of labour in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, in spite of democratization pressures, provides some valuable insights into the nature of power and of political exclusion/inclusion in late industrializing experiences.

Both Indonesia and Malaysia have clearly experienced decades of sustained industrialization before the economic crisis of 1997, and been counted among the 'miracle' Asian economies. By 1993, manufacturing had accounted for 30 per cent of Malaysia's GDP, compared to just 13 per cent in 1970. At the same time, the contribution of agriculture had declined from 31 per cent to 16 per cent of the GDP (Gomez and Jomo 1997:41). Like Malaysia, the structure of the Indonesian economy also changed significantly with rapid industrialization. Manufacturing, which accounted for a mere 8 per cent of the Indonesian GDP in the mid-1960s (Hal Hill 1994: 57), constituted 24 per cent by 1995, while the contribution of agriculture dwindled steadily from 25 per cent in 1980 to about 18 per cent of the GDP in 1996 (World Bank 1996:139). In both countries, manufacturing exports became increasingly important revenue earners, replacing a past reliance on the export of primary products.

Nevertheless, the extent of socio-structural changes brought about by industrialization differed. The middle class expanded in Malaysia to about 33.5 per cent of the working population by 1993, while production workers constituted 28.5 per cent (Jesudason 1996:129). In Indonesia, the middle and working classes comprise a far smaller portion of the working population, and the agricultural workforce a much larger one. The professional and middle classes made up a mere 3.9 per cent of the workforce in Indonesia before the crisis (Robison 1996:84), while manufacturing sector workers comprised a relatively modest 12.6 per cent (World Bank 1996:153).

In both countries, labour was largely excluded from political processes throughout the period of rapid industrialization. In Indonesia, the domestication of labour, while involving some regularization of institutional practices, also involved generous doses of outright repression, often including the use of violence

and intimidation on the part of state security forces. In Malaysia, as indicated in Chapter 1, the regularization of institutions has been much more pronounced, while relatively less outright repression has been utilized in recent times to maintain organized labour's domestication. Japanese-style enterprise unions have also had a larger role than they traditionally had in Indonesia—having only been introduced in 1994—signifying an emphasis on less overtly coercive strategies to keep workers at bay. Such in-house, or enterprise unions, which essentially nullify the idea of industry-wide and national-based organizations, have been geared to weaken national labour centres by obstructing labour solidarity beyond the immediate factory gate.

Ethno-religious cleavages within the working class in both countries may have salient effects on the development of working class solidarity. In Indonesia, regional and to some extent, religious identities have played an ambivalent, contradictory role in the forging of such solidarity at the grassroots level—sometimes supporting, sometimes obstructing it (see Hadiz 1999). In Malaysia however, communalism has perhaps more clearly hindered cooperation between Chinese, Indian and Malay workers, though this in part is a legacy of the colonial-era division of labour, characterized by a lack of participation by Malays in the non-agricultural sector.[2]

In Indonesia and Malaysia, the radical stream of the labour movement has long been smashed; in Malaysia essentially by a colonial government and in Indonesia by a reactionary coalition of forces led by the military. The legacy of these defeats remains an important factor in understanding the politics of labour in both countries.

With the aid of comparisons with Malaysia, the chapter assesses the possibilities and constraints for the development of an effective labour movement in Indonesia in this present conjuncture. Specifically, it assesses whether several decades of sustained industrialization before the 1997 economic debacle created the social base for the development of such a movement. It is suggested that workers have presently little capacity to influence the agenda of a reform movement dominated by political actors organically unconnected to the labour movement (Hadiz 2000b).

Because of the importance of the international context in helping determine the milieu within which national-level labour movements wage their struggles, the way that economic globalization influences the trajectories of late industrializing countries such as Indonesia, in terms of opportunities for or constraints on labour, needs to be considered as well. Thus, this chapter also questions the impact of economic globalization on the bargaining positions of state, capital, and labour, especially in the context of the Asian economic crisis. It is argued that labour movements emerging under conditions of late industrialization face particularly difficult political terrain as globalization has tended to weaken their bargaining positions while simultaneously facilitating the growth and maturation of the working class. However, developing the capacity for self-organization remains crucial to long-term struggles, especially in such difficult terrain.

Some theoretical concerns

Elsewhere (Hadiz 1997) I have proposed a framework that distinguishes three historical models of accommodation between state, capital and labour: the 'social democratic', the 'populist', and the 'exclusionary'.[3] The 'social democratic' model of accommodation is characterized by strong independent trade union movements with representation and mobilizational roles, but confined to struggles in the socio-economic realm—due to the forfeiting of the highly political socialist project. The later establishment of the welfare state, which guarantees relatively high levels of prosperity and security for the working class, perhaps best symbolizes this particular form of accommodation, largely emerging from the experience of the first industrializing countries of Western Europe. Nevertheless, tensions and contradictions have been emerging within this model. These are exemplified by the decline of the welfare state and the onslaught on organized labour, as well as workers' living standards, throughout many of the advanced industrialized countries in recent decades.[4]

The 'populist' accommodation model characterizes the experience of several Latin American countries. Its features include relatively strong trade union movements, medium to high levels of subordination of these movements to states, and high representational and mobilizational roles for labour organizations. Mainly underpinned by the improving welfare of urban workers in the formal sector, it was also characterized by the high level of politicization of the labour movement. This is owing in part to the legacy of state-labour relations under such regimes as Peron in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil (see Alexander 1963), but also to the socialist, anarchist and populist ideologies imported by Latin American working class movements through large-scale immigration from Europe. The populist accommodation has been very tenuous however, and strongly anti-labour military governments did emerge, intent on breaking the back of organized labour. On the other hand, the relatively well-established labour movements of Argentina and Brazil clearly played a role in the limited democratization following the fall of authoritarian military regimes, showing the importance of labour movements in democratization proeesses.[5]

A third model of accommodation proposed was one that was called 'exclusionary', applicable to the experiences of the very late industrializing countries of East and Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and Malaysia. Its features are very high levels of trade union subordination to states, the demobilization and control of organized labour and the confinement of its role largely to the socio-economic sphere (see Chapter 3). These features suited in particular the export-led industrialization strategy, especially in its early phase, which relied on the domestication of a cheap and politically docile labour force. Nevertheless the emergence of the exclusionary model was not directly tied to export-led industrialization, for it usually pre-dated it in the form of endeavours by dominant directing states, quite insulated from class forces, to thwart or pre-empt the development of labour as a social force. This was all related to the nature

of the post-colonial state in these societies and was tied to the struggle against communism and left-wing movements across Asia in the context of the Cold War (Deyo 1987:183–6; see also Chapters 1 and 2 in this book).

The evolution and formation of these different models of accommodation between state, capital and labour was of course intricately connected to the constellation of social, political and economic forces, especially during crucial times in the industrialization process, as well as the international context encountered. In general, the later that industrialization proceeded, the tougher the terrain for the struggles of workers and their organizations. Though emerging through distinct routes in different Western European countries, social democratic forms of accommodation between state, capital and labour became plausible because of the strength of the working class movement in the crucial period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It may justifiably be perceived as the eventual compromise that followed such experiences as Luddism and Chartism in Britain, and nearrevolutionary situations in several countries on the European continent over this period, before becoming entrenched after the Second World War (see Geary 1981, 1989).

By contrast, the populist accommodation in Latin America was in part a reaction by state elites to being confronted with an organized labour movement which was too weak to win radical social, political and economic concessions, but too strong to be crushed by force. Though this working class had inherited Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist ideologies from Western and Southern European immigrants, elites learaed from the European experience that it was possible to co-opt and accommodate organized labour to avert revolutionary insurrection (Kurth 1979: 357–8). Moreover, industrialization was oriented towards the domestic market and minimized the need to maintain internationally competitive labour costs, thereby stimulating 'domestic purchasing power to support industrial development'. This encouraged the growth of broad development coalitions comprising 'the urban middle classes, industrialists, state bureaucrats, and unionized workers'. It also 'partially muted the contrary pressure from employers to restrict labour costs and justified government efforts to increase welfare expenditure by firms and the state for workers' (Deyo 1987:182–3).

The states of very late industrializing East and Southeast Asia however, confronted weak working class movements, that in the early stages of industrialization could be constrained by thoroughly authoritarian and repressive measures. There was no need to include labour in broad development coalitions. Thus, while Latin American policy makers had to take into consideration the interests and demands of organized labour in charting economic development paths, their Asian counterparts were largely free to ignore those of their own poorly organized workers.[6]

It should be emphasized, however, that it would be unfruitful to analytically treat workers as mere passive objects bound by 'structural imperatives' or by the designs of more powerful elites. They can be, sometimes even in dire circumstances, active historical agencies influencing their environment and

political contexts by eliciting counter-responses to working class strategies from state and capital (see Moody 1997). Much has been written about working class struggles in the inhospitable terrain of contemporary Asia, Africa (e.g. Andrae and Beckman 1998), and elsewhere. Indeed, it is important to note how workers, especially when well-organized, or when the forces representing state and capital are particularly weak or fragmented, have shown the ability to actively respond to difficult environments. Moreover, victories and losses in present struggles can help shape the terrain on which later ones, by future generations of workers, take place, and the terms on which they are waged. Assisting in the development of these terms are the worker-poets examined in Chapter 7. It is in this sense that the 'historical legacies' left by the outcomes of past struggles remain important in influencing the trajectories of labour movements.

At the same time, however, it is necessary to recognize that struggles by historical agencies are not waged in a social, political and economic vacuum. There is never an infinite array of options or possibilities open to the working class or any historical actor in any specific historical context. As Marx famously observed: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past' (1963:15). It is with such an understanding of the importance of historical legacies that the condition of the labour movement in post-Suharto Indonesia is approached here.

Globalization, labour and late industrialization

When considering the position of labour 'under circumstances directly encountered', an important factor to examine is the changing international political and economic context. Crucial to such an understanding is the increasing international mobility of capital *vis-à-vis* immobile states and relatively immobile workforces in the present conjuncture. This mobility is of course inextricably linked to 'globalization'—an analytical term which remains nebulous in economic as well as social science discourse. Even if understood as simply referring to the increasing internationalization of the processes involved in production and finance, globalization has clearly had profound consequences for both state and labour. It is not necessary to agree with the most extreme proponents of the globalization thesis to recognize that the terrain on which well-established labour movements in advanced industrialization countries, as well as struggling ones in late industrialization countries, operate, has been quite irrevocably reshaped over the last few decades.[7] Thus, globalization exerts a profound influence on the trajectories of emerging labour movements (e.g. Hadiz 2000a).

It is clear, for example, that capital's enhanced mobility has allowed it quite successfully to demand favourable investment climates, therefore increasing pressure on states to restrict the activities of organized labour (Beeson and Hadiz 1998). In advanced industrialized countries, this has added pressure towards the unravelling of the welfare state and caused organized labour to become

increasingly marginalized as a social and political force. In countries such as Indonesia, it severely hinders the development of a labour movement capable of influencing the direction of economic and political change, as displayed during the 1997 economic crisis in Asia. Thus Deyo cites an ILO report that demonstrates how globalization of capital, production and markets has been accompanied by the reduction in the level of protection of worker rights in developing countries (Deyo 1997:212).

But globalization has not affected all workers in exactly the same way. Offering a structural explanation for the decline in the global bargaining position of labour which focuses on the impact of capital mobility, Winters (1996) argues that this decline will vary according to the mobility options of investors and employers. Hence, unions facing employers that can cross national jurisdictions will 'feel the full force of devastation of capital's structural power'. Moreover, according to Winters, those confronting investors that can relocate across sub-national lines will also be severely weakened, 'though the prospect still exists of organizing out to the limits of the national boundary and pressuring employers with the strike option'. Strongest of all, 'are workers who confront highly immobile employers that have very little structural power at their disposal'. Among these, he suggests, are university employees, those working in city and state bureaucracies and transportation workers (Winters 1996).

Globalization has also not created conditions for international working class solidarity. This is demonstrated, for example, in the promotion of protectionist strategies by trade unionists in some countries in Western Europe and North America to constrain the relocation of industries and jobs to low-wage countries. But the lack of international solidarity is not only a 'North-South' phenomenon, but also a 'South-South' one. Malaysian trade unionists, for example, have done little to protect Indonesian migrant workers in their country, whose position is particularly precarious in time of economic crisis in the region.[8]

Indonesia is but one of several late industrializing countries that have been struggling to achieve a niche in the global division of labour as a producer of low wage, manufactured goods. It has done so especially since the fall of international oil prices in the early 1980s. Notably, foreign investors in this area are among the most internationally mobile, thereby rendering Indonesian manufacturing workers among the most vulnerable to the dictates of international capital, if the logic of Winters' argument is to be followed. Significantly, due to the poor performance of its heavy industries, Malaysia also put renewed emphasis on its export-oriented manufacturing sector during the same period, and undertook policies to simplify bureaucratic procedures and entice foreign investment (Kuruvilla 1995:45).

Indonesia is also a chronically labour surplus economy, in spite of some tightening in the labour market that was taking place prior to the Asian economic crisis (Manning 1998). Though the relationship between the emergence of effective labour movements and the tightening of labour markets is more complex than usually conceded by mainstream economists, a chronic labour surplus condition commonly acts as a constraint on the bargaining position of organized

labour.[9] Thus, in countries such as Indonesia, more pliant workers from the long unemployment line can easily substitute for the ones with an inclination to organize or protest, thereby constraining the development of sustainable organizing activities. This is especially so during an economic crisis that has produced an increasingly longer unemployment line. It is not surprising that international investors operating in Indonesia are keen to reiterate that the country's attractiveness lies in part in the presence of a cheap (and generally unorganized) labour force. The barely veiled threat made is that changes to these conditions could facilitate relocation to many other countries scrambling to offer a cheap labour force and some measure of political security.

The Malaysian case, however, demonstrates the less than direct correspondence between strong labour movements and tight labour markets. Even in a traditionally tight labour market such as Malaysia, organized labour has not demonstrated much influence over state policy, notwith-standing the criticism offered by the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) on the government's handling of Malaysia's response to the Asian crisis period of political and economic uncertainty (Chandran 1998). Although workers in the key electronics industry have made some inroads into organizing (Arudsothy and Littler 1993:116, 123–4), where before they had been severely hindered, it is the legacy of past struggles —lost by workers—which has largely continued to constrain organized labour's contemporary effectiveness in Malaysia. To this, Deyo adds the significance of the importation of cost cutting, and post-Fordist flexible production systems at the enterprise-level, which reflect the global ascendance of neoliberal ideas about economic restructuring at the present juncture in the development of the world economy. This has taken place in spite of the protestations of Malaysian trade unionists about the use of temporary workers that almost inevitably accompanies such systems (Deyo 1997:207). At the same time, the importation of Japanese style in-house unionism signalled the advent of other instruments that hinder the development of national-level working class solidarity and powerful unions (Jomo and Todd 1994:170).[10]

But the effects of globalization have been full of contradictions. Meiksins Wood (1998) argues, for example, that in *advanced* industrial countries, capital is dependent on states more than ever before, because of its increasingly active role in restructuring the economy to the 'detriment of everyone' but capital. Thus, capital needs states 'to clear the path' toward the global economy, whether by advocating neo-liberal policies or other means.[11] In the process, the increasing obviousness of the closeness of the state to the interests of capital, according to Meiksins Wood, means that the state can increasingly become the target of anti-capitalist struggle. Thus, the 'actions of the state have driven people into the streets, to oppose state policies in countries as diverse as Canada and South Korea'. If her argument were to be accepted, globalization *could* yet form the basis for more unified, national working class struggles, and nullify tendencies toward fragmented and merely localized ones, though it is noteworthy that she is referring especially to the case of advanced capitalist societies (Meiksins Wood 1998:13–

15). On the other hand, as Leys (1996) observes, 'no state…can pursue any economic policy that the owners of capital seriously dislike', noting the control exerted by capital markets or in the case of the Third World, especially by IMF/World Bank policy (Leys 1996:23).

The effects of globalization, nonetheless, have also been contradictory for some late industrializing countries (see also Mittelman and Othman 2001). If there has been some resurgence in labour organizing under difficult domestic conditions in Indonesia (e.g. an anti-labour repressive state, chronic labour over-supply, etc.), it is largely because greater integration with the world economy has spurred the growth of a larger, 'maturing' industrialization workforce with increasing organizational propensities. As discussed in Hadiz (1997: chs 6–7), such a process was accelerated by Indonesia's adoption after the fall of international oil prices in the early 1980s, of an export-led industrialization strategy premised on low wage manufacturing.

Thus industrialization provided some of the conditions for a more active labour movement in Indonesia. These include the steady growth of wage labour and a much less transient working class, new levels of urban density facilitating transport and communication, relatively higher levels of worker education and literacy, more permanent working class areas of residence, and the concentration of large numbers of workers in such areas. This is the case even though Indonesian workers remain in the early stages of learning to organize effectively, compared to their counterparts in South Korea for example. Significantly, the complete destruction of the radical stream of the labour movement in Indonesia in the mid-1960s has meant that the history, experience and political ideologies of the pre-New Order labour movement have now been lost to at least two whole generations of workers. Nothing similar to the events of 1965 in Indonesia occurred in Malaysia. However, the British colonial authorities' eradication of the communist-influenced labour movement, supplanting it with one more moderate and less political, has also meant that Malaysian workers have lost a rich, important part of their political heritage (see also Chapter 1). This policy of eradication was continued in the immediate post-independence period (see Gamba 1962; Zaidi 1975; and Stenton 1980, for accounts of the suppression).

The new organizational propensities among Indonesian workers developed as industrialization proceeded, in spite of long-established state mechanisms of labour control, usually legitimized in official discourse by reference to supposedly authentic Indonesian cultural values that frown on conflict and uphold the virtues of harmony and cooperation. In Malaysia, Mahathir's 'Look East' policy meant the extolling of some values like cooperation and self-sacrifice that are claimed to be uniquely Asian (see more in Chapter 7). Thus, the Mahathir government has repeatedly urged workers to serve the firm as they would serve the nation. Though clearly inspired by the Japanese experience, in the Malaysian context such display of loyalty is not accompanied, however, by 'lifelong employment, the seniority wage system, and other complementary aspects of Japanese industrial relations' (Jomo and Todd 1994:171).

Not surprisingly, the immediate period following the fall of Suharto in Indonesia was characterized not only by the proliferation of new political parties, but also of new endeavours to form independent trade unions, previously suppressed as a matter of state policy. The unravelling of the New Order has clearly opened up new opportunities for workers' organizations. At the same time, these opportunities are being presented at a time of deep economic crisis, which has caused massive unemployment levels. The folding of countless firms, including some labour intensive manufacturing, did nothing to enhance the bargaining position of labour. As observed by Indonesian labour activist Ariest Merdeka Sirait, 'for whatever reason, if industries vanish then the power of labour will decline', as the basis for organization also dissipates.[12]

Before we go on to examine workers' responses to *Reformasi,* and how they have fared, we must first briefly examine the framework of labour controls that was developed under Suharto's New Order and that continues to influence the milieu within which labour organizing takes place. In the process, we shall continue to make comparisons with the Malaysian case to demonstrate how the political exclusion of labour can be exercised in different ways.

State and labour

As discussed elsewhere (Hadiz 1997: chs 4–5, 1998), Suharto's New Order gradually developed a well-entrenched framework of labour control that effectively suppressed independent labour organizing activities. Although there was no simple functional correspondence between the economic aims of the early New Order and its labour agenda, the maintenance of a politically moderate labour movement suited objectives such as curbing inflation, attracting foreign investment and aid, as well as generally re-establishing connections with the world economy. Notwithstanding the role of various labour organizations in assisting the government to create a more 'investorfriendly' image for Indonesia,[13] the destruction of the pro-communist SOBSI *(Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia),* the largest and most well-organized labour federation, meant that workers were powerless to influence policy making in the early New Order.

If in Indonesia the massacres which accompanied the destruction of the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) in 1965–6 %5–6 led to the crippling of the labour movement, in Malaysia, ethnic and communal conflict in the late 1960s was met by tightened controls over organized labour (Deyo 1997: 207). Occurring in the aftermath of riots following elections in May 1969, emergency regulations restricting trade unions were introduced to guarantee the industrial peace deemed necessary to attract foreign investment (Jomo and Todd 1994:124–5; Zaidi 1975:266–75).[14] But unlike in Indonesia, the communist 'problem' was already more or less 'solved' by the British colonial authorities and hence there was no significant 'threat' to induce the wholesale destruction of much of the organized labour—merely the development of a regime that would better guarantee its political compliance.

Indeed, the controls over organized labour put in place in the early years of the New Order were the product of a perceived need to pre-empt the reemergence of militant and radical tendencies within organized labour, given the historically strong links with the PKI. Ultimately, however, even a barely effective labour movement was to be considered threatening to the New Order's economic development agenda—premised in theoretical terms, like in Malaysia, upon social and political stability and containing political opposition (Kuruvilla 1995:48). This was to be the case even when the danger of a resurgence of the communist stream in the labour movement had long subsided as the scapegoating of the PRD (People's Democratic Party) as communist in 1996 shows.

There are parallels here with the experience of several other countries in East and Southeast Asia, where the crushing of communists or the radical stream of labour movements preceded rapid industrialization presided by authoritarian states. In Singapore, for example, the crushing of the Left in the early 1960s was accompanied by the establishment of the NTUC (National Trade Union Congress) to maintain state control over organized labour (Leggett 1993). In South Korea, the dictator Syngman Rhee suppressed the labour movement well before that country's rapid export-led growth in the 1960s, with the help of a USA fearful of communist penetration and influence. Significantly, it was during the period of American occupation that a staunchly anti-communist labour centre, the FKTU (Federation of Korean Trade Unions), was established (Kim 1993:135–6).

As mentioned earlier, the communist 'problem' had already been largely dealt with in colonial Malaya by the British authorities, who in the process crushed a strongly ethnic Chinese and communist-dominated labour movement (Arudsothy and Littler 1993:112). Though this anti-labour thrust was continued in the immediate post-independence period, such an outcome virtually guaranteed that the future independent Malaysian state would be insulated from the start from pressure exerted by any significant radical labour-based social or political force (Jomo and Todd 1994: chs 4–6). It is partly for this reason that the relationship between organized labour and state has been more fluid and ambivalent than in Indonesia where state and labour relations came to be premised on a victory won by anti-communist forces led by the military after an ultimately bloody struggle.

Thus, in spite of organized labour's domestication and political exclusion, the MTUC, created in 1950 under the tutelage of colonial authorities as a moderate labour federation, has from time to time incurred the anger of Malaysian state officials. Differences with the government account for much of the separation of the conservative public sector workers union, CUEPACS (Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services), from the MTUC in 1980—a move aimed to further weaken the labour movement. Moreover, another labour centre, the now defunct Malaysian Labour Organization (MLO) was established in 1989, clearly to undermine the MTUC's claim to being the main body representing Malaysian workers (Kuruvilla 1995:55). The MLO's creation was apparently induced by the government's unhappiness with the MTUC's opposition to draconian amendments to existing labour legislation as well as its support for

electronics workers who had been barred from establishing a nation-wide union (Jomo and Todd 1994:162–4).

In Suharto's New Order, the relationship between the 'official' labour movement and the state was much clearer. Controls over organized labour were much more pervasive and intensive, and the methods used to deal with dissent much more openly brutal. For example, security forces have regularly been involved in the resolution of labour disputes. This was perhaps best signified by the celebrated case of the brutal murder, sexual assault and kidnapping of Marsinah in East Java in 1993 (see Chapters 6 and 7). Though the case remains unresolved, it is widely believed that the local military command played a major role in the affair, in an attempt to quell a labour strike that she was organizing (YLBHI 1994).

It is significant that the radical stream of the Indonesian labour movement in the 1950s and 1960s was pitted directly against an army, in particular one which developed both a political and material basis to oppose the development of a strong workers' movement. That the New Order itself was established by a coalition of forces led by the military, premised on the destruction of the PKI and its allies, clearly influenced the way that labour was dealt with in Suharto's New Order. Among the coalition members were Islamic-oriented parties and organizations, some of which were tied to labour organizations that opposed SOBSI's doctrine of class struggle in the labour area. But a wide range of other groups were also involved, including Catholic and more secular socialist parties and organizations, some of which also had ties with unions opposed to SOBSI.[15] Significantly, the legacy of past struggles between the military and communists continued to influence state policy toward labour in Indonesia long after the latter had vanished from the scene, and this was manifest in draconian controls over labour throughout the New Order.

It was the military's assumption of managerial control over newly nationalized foreign firms in 1957 that consolidated its vested interest in the maintenance of industrial 'peace'. This placed the military in direct confrontation with the more radical unions associated with the PKI-linked SOBSI (Hadiz 1997:53–4). But even before this, as early as 1950–1, the military was already engaged in an adversarial relationship with militant labour, then still buoyed by the euphoria of revolution that accompanied the newly completed independence struggle (see Stoler 1985: 142; Feith 1962:188–9).

If the PKI's decimation in the mid-1960s automatically meant SOBSI's own violent elimination from the labour scene, its former rivals in the labour movement —many of which had worked together with the army— gained little in the years to follow. In 1973, as the culmination of a protracted and complicated process, the remaining labour organizations were forced to join a new state-sponsored federation, the FBSI *(Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia)*. This organization would later be known as the SPSI *(Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia)* and then the FSPSI *(Federasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia)* (Hadiz 1997:71–82). With the establishment of the FBSI, links between the labour movement and political parties were officially severed and its subordination to the dictates of

state officials became more or less formalized. Like the MTUC in Malaysia, the FBSI was created to replace a radically inclined labour movement with one more moderate and pliant, the difference being that a colonial force had established the MTUC much earlier.

The creation of the FBSI was soon accompanied by the promulgation of *Hubungan Industrial Pancasila* (HIP, Pancasila Industrial Relations), presented by state officials as uniquely suited to Indonesian culture and opposed to externally derived notions of conflict, whether liberal or communist (see Moertopo 1975). Under HIP, workers, capital and the state were components of one big happy family, with the latter playing the role of benevolent father. Consequently, even the legally recognized right to strike became stigmatized as 'un-Indonesian', and therefore, improper in the cultural context. While nothing like HIP ever existed in Malaysia, the extolling of 'Asian' values of cooperation arguably plays a large part in legitimizing stringent controls over the exercise of the right to strike.

Significantly, it was Suharto's main political trouble-shooter, the Machiavellian General Ali Moertopo, who masterminded both the establishment of the FBSI in 1973 and the promulgation of Pancasila Industrial Relations. He also engineered the simultaneous domestication and fusion of political parties that left the remaining labour unions bereft of political orientation. Indeed in the 1950s, most of the major trade unions had close links, official or unofficial, to the major political parties.[16]

Another major architect of the New Order's system of labour control was Admiral Sudomo. As Minister of Manpower from 1983 to 1988, the former security chief directed a transformation within the FBSI in 1985 that produced a more centralized and easily controllable organization than even Moertopo had envisaged. Dispensing with the industry-based unions that comprised the FBSI, he forced the adoption of a military-like command structure, which left little autonomy for labour activists at the grassroots level. Thus, ten SPSI 'departments' directly under the control of the organization's central body replaced the twenty-one sectoral unions of the FBSI, each of which had direct access to enterprise-level unions. The change must be seen as a response to outbreaks of labour unrest in the late 1970s and early 1980s, amidst currency devaluations and recessionary trends. To the quintessentially New Order Sudomo, the FBSI was 'too liberal' in structure,[17] rendering it unsatisfactory as a tool of control.

Under the tutelage of other ministers of manpower, another restructuring took place, which eventually produced the FSPSI in 1995. The latter incarnation of the original FBSI revived the industry-based union format that had vanished under Sudomo. Thirteen industry-based unions were registered—which then-Minister of Manpower, Abdul Latief, stressed were 'autonomous'—although in reality all remained under the auspices of the FSPSI's central body (Hadiz 1997:164–5). This restructuring was clearly a further response to yet another, though more serious, growth of labour unrest, as well as to the proliferation of alternative vehicles of worker organization to be discussed below. The aim was to dispel criticism, both internal and domestic, about the lack of freedom to organize, and

to create a better image for the much-maligned state-backed labour organization. Significantly, Indonesian labour-based NGOs were increasingly gaining international attention in the 1990s for their criticism of Indonesia's dismal labour rights record and of the ineffectual SPSI.

In spite of these changes, state officials almost consistently presented labour as a source of disruption to the political stability regarded as essential for economic success throughout Suharto's rule. This was frequently asserted by alluding to the communist influence over the labour movement prior to the New Order's establishment. Thus, the New Order's first Minister of Manpower, Police General Awaloeddin Djamin, warned the 'Indonesian nation and people' that labour would always present a problem, as long as the PKI was not completely smashed (*Angkatan Bersendjata,* 3 March 1967).

Decades later, state officials continued to associate labour unrest with the work of communist insurgents. Sudomo, a foe of both communists and liberals, at one time suggested that the emergence of labour unrest in Indonesia in the 1990s was due to the adoption by 'liberals' of 'New Left' tactics.[18] It was during Sudomo's tenure as Minister that the supra-national security agency Kopkamtib *(Komando Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban)* issued a widely distributed questionnaire to workers. It queried, among other things, their views on the 'attempted communist coup' of 1965, the involvement of any family members in the unrest, and their knowledge of Marxism/Leninism.[19]

Unlike in Malaysia, the intervention of security personnel in labour disputes was almost a constant feature of Suharto's Indonesia, but hardly ever more so than during Sudomo's tenure as head of Kopkamtib and then as Minister of Manpower. In 1986, Sudomo promulgated a ministerial decision that gave legal basis for the military's role in monitoring and settling industrial problems. Though this decision was repealed in 1994 by one of his successors, the businessman Abdul Latief, such a role is condoned on the basis of a 1990 policy established by the head of Bakorstanas (*Badan Koordinasi Strategis Nasional,* the reincarnation of Kopkamtib), General Try Sutrisno, who was simultaneously commander of the armed forces.

The main function of the FSPSI and its previous incarnations within this 'security approach' to industrial unrest had been to assist in prohibiting the development of labour organizing vehicles outside of the control of the state. From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, its officials even took part in *ad hoc* security teams set up by Sudomo to prevent and repress labour unrest, working closely with Kopkamtib (Tanter 1990:253–61). Significantly, the organization was also 'colonized' to an extent by the military, as numerous active or retired officers served as heads of regional and local branches (Lambert 1993:15–16). Thus, official workers' representatives at the company level have sometimes turned out to be men with military backgrounds who work as company personnel managers, and therefore qualify as employees,

Given these experiences, the FSPSI and its prior incarnations have been a much less ambiguous government tool than the MTUC in Malaysia. The links with the

government have likewise been much less ambivalent. Golkar parliamentarians and officials, for example, tended to increasingly dominate the FSPSI's central leadership (Hadiz 1997:101–2), although an important position in the organization never guaranteed an access point to the political fast-track.[20] In Malaysia, by contrast, many labour leaders were linked to some of the opposition political parties. More recently however, 'the majority of MTUC council members have been members of parties affiliated to the *Barisan Nasional*…often serving in their respective parties' labour bureaus' (Jomo and Todd 1994:172). In both countries the separation of trade unionism from political activism has been emphasized in official discourse, thus disavowing the tradition of a militantly political unionism that took an essential part in their respective anti-colonial struggles.

Organizing after the fall

The economic and political context

Employers and state officials had been troubled by the sudden rise in labour unrest in Indonesia throughout most of the 1990s. In 1989 there were only nineteen cases of labour strikes recorded by the Department of Manpower, while 350 were documented for 1996, involving hundreds of thousands of workers. Non-government observers, however, have regularly put the actual number of strikes at several times that which is officially recognized. The majority of these cases have taken place in heavily industrialized areas in West Java, Central Java and North Sumatra, with a growing number of cases recorded in urban centres on other islands. Numerous strikes—especially those undocumented—are considered 'wildcat' as they fail to conform to stringent regulations on how to formally undertake industrial action.

But Indonesia is not alone among late industrializing Southeast Asian countries with stringent regulations governing the right to strike. They similarly exist in Malaysia, as may be garnered from the Industrial Relations Act of 1967, and additional legislation in 1971, 1976 and 1980. Compared to Indonesia, however, such regulations have apparently been more successful in curbing labour unrest (Crouch 1996:224–6; Jomo and Todd 1994:130). In 1989, there were just seven strikes in Malaysia (Kuruvilla 1995:58), and no dramatic increase has since been reported. But the absence of labour unrest in Malaysia is undoubtedly also attributable to the fact that the ruling *Barisan Nasional* claims to be pursuing policies geared to improving the relative position of ethnic Malays. Given the growing number of Malays within the category of working class, it is conceivable that many perceive an identity of interests with that of the ruling party, thereby reducing the possibility of militant labour organizing.[21]

In spite of their renewed activism in the 1990s, Indonesian workers were conspicuous by their relative absence from the events that brought Suharto down in 1998.[22] The primary reason for this was quite straightforward: workers were

too weakened and bewildered by sudden mass retrenchments and skyrocketing prices of basic commodities to quickly respond to Indonesia's rapidly changing political situation. Even when the government temporarily imposed a wage freeze in early 1998, workers found themselves initially unable to protest effectively. Nevertheless, several weeks before Suharto resigned on 21 May 1998, some workers were showing signs of being on the move again, with sporadic strikes and protests breaking out in West Java's industrial centres. Eventually, workers did combine with students in the dramatic and decisive flve-day takeover of Parliament House that was supported by women's activism (see Chapter 6). Like passengers desperate to get off the Titanic, even a delegation from the FSPSI was present at Parliament House to demand Suharto's resignation.

The effects of the Asian economic crisis have obviously been more serious on Indonesia than on Malaysia. Though the Malaysian economy shrank significantly in 1998, the Mahathir government realistically expected growth in 1999. Nevertheless, from June 1997 to approximately mid-1998, 80,000 workers were retrenched in Malaysia. As in Indonesia, these retrenchments were mainly concentrated in the manufacturing, construction and finance sectors. In spite of faring better, the Malaysian government did forecast in 1998 that unemployment in the traditionally tight labour market country would rise from 2.4 to 6.4 per cent that year (Chandran 1998). Immigrant workers, the majority Indonesians, apparently fared particularly badly: though many were not officially retrenched, they simply did not have their contracts renewed.[23]

In Indonesia, political reasons were increasingly focused upon by government critics to explain why the country had not been able to cope with the Asian economic crisis as 'well' as its neighbours such as Thailand, the Philippines or Malaysia. Suharto's decrepit political system, encouraging official corruption, collusion and cronyism involving state officials and big business, was presented as the core of the problem. Thus, various sections of Indonesia's revitalized opposition began to demand a thorough reconstitution of politics as soon as the new President, B.J.Habibie, took over the reins of power. Though vague hopes permeated that workers would actually benefit from *Reformasi,* it was less than clear what workers might concretely attain in the process. Indeed, could they have a part at all in assuring change in their interests? Could they develop the vehicles representing the interests of workers in the process of contestation between contending forces to reconfigure Indonesian politics following the fall of Suharto?

On the one hand, the stagnation of Indonesia's economy had meant the loss of jobs and a concurrent further weakening of labour's bargaining position as hundreds of businesses continued to fold.[24] On the other hand, continuing demands for political change in the face of a teetering regime meant that opportunities would arise for new organizing efforts as these had in the past been stifled mainly for political reasons—historically rooted fears about the disruptive effects of a well-organized labour movement.[25]

Labour organizers understood quite well the difficulties they confronted in spite of the new opportunities.[26] They were aware that their organizational weakness

prior to the economic crisis and the fall of Suharto meant that workers were constrained in their ability to exploit whatever openings were presented by the events of May 1998. As stated by veteran labour activist Teten Masduki:[27] 'It seems that there is now an opportunity to organise…[but workers feel they are] lucky to just be able to hold on to their jobs, This is what hinders, on the other hand, the process of labour organizing.'

They were perhaps also not unaware that they were hindered by the fact that the *Reformasi* movement, itself highly fragmented along different groups, was very much dominated by middle class intellectuals and politicians with few organic links with the labour movement. Significantly, however, many professed themselves encouraged by the actions of students that were so instrumental in bringing Suharto down.[28] As one activist put it: 'If students could bring Suharto down—I don't know how many workers there are in Indonesia right now—but I can imagine a huge army if, for example, there would be a common view [among workers].'[29]

In Malaysia, by contrast, Mahathir has been much more successful in maintaining his authority, especially given that his controversial policies on capital controls have worked better than critics expected. Nevertheless, as noted in Chapter 1, a new political opposition rallying against official corruption and collusion developed in 1998, centred on former Mahathir deputy and protégé, Anwar Ibrahim. As in Indonesia, however, this opposition does not appear to have strong organic links with the labour movement, although some labour activists in Malaysia, including within the MTUC, have recently been involved in pro-democracy events. Indeed, a joint press conference was even held at the MTUC headquarters in 1998 by an amalgam of trade unionists, NGOs and political party activists, condemning government disruptions of public meetings. Importantly, however, unlike Suharto, the legitimacy of the Mahathir government has not been as severely undermined by economic crisis; in fact by blaming overseas currency speculators, the Prime Minister created a nationalist rallying point for the support of his policies.

New organizing vehicles

Worker activism clearly began to rise again in Indonesia in the wake of Suharto's fall, after being sharply reduced at the start of the economic crisis. According to Indonesian government data, eighty-three strikes took place in June 1998, compared to just four in February. Again, these must be considered conservative estimates.[30] Equally significantly, workers and activists were soon also preparing the way for the establishment of new independent unions.

As mentioned earlier, an important facet of state-society relations under Suharto's rule was the curtailment of the right to organize by the upholding of the monopoly on labour 'representation' by one state-backed and statecreated union organization. This monopoly became difficult if not impossible to sustain as new unions were quickly formed. More than a dozen union organizations have now

registered, although most of these appear not to have taken part in the upsurge of labour unrest beginning in the 1990s. A major exception is the SBSI *(Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia),* a union formed in 1992 by the lawyer Muchtar Pakpahan, which was frequently the target of repression under the Suharto government.

Indeed, it was not only those who had been involved in the rise of labour unrest earlier in the decade that were interested in forming new unions. In early May 1998, a group of activists associated with ICMI (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia,* the Association of Muslim Intellectuals), announced the establishment of the *Persaudaraan Pekerja Muslim Indonesia* (PPMI). While this may have been partly an attempt to develop populist credentials for the organization once chaired by Habibie, or even to preempt increasingly uncontrollable tendencies in the labour movement, it also anticipated later developments. Talk of establishing new independent unions was certainly not new in Indonesia, in spite of the difficulties experienced by such organizations as Setiakawan, the SBSI and the PPBI (*Pusat Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia,* Centre for Indonesian Working Class Struggles) before Suharto's resignation. Formed in 1990, Setiakawan quickly folded due to internal rifts and government pressure. The SBSI, formed in 1992, has survived several waves of repression, while the PPBI, established in 1994, linked to the radical student-based People's Democratic Party (PRD), was suppressed in 1996 when its leaders were arrested and gaoled. However, it has since resurfaced.

At the forefront of new organizing attempts following Suharto's resignation, were lower-profile activists linked to networks of worker groups, especially in the Jabotabek (Jakarta/Bogor/Tangerang/Bekasi) and wider West Java area. Many of these were the result of the organizing efforts throughout the 1990s that frequently involved cooperation between workers and NGO activists. One of the main differences between these networks and others that existed previously is that they have more or less consciously limited the role of NGOs in their activities, in favour of developing a leadership emerging out of the rank-and-file. The often cited reason for this, as suggested by one labour organizer, is that, 'whether consciously or not, NGOs concerned with labour issues have…caused disunity [among workers].'[31] Indeed rivalry among some NGOs jealously guarding their respective turf has arguably been one factor hindering the development of greater organizational capacity. Thus, another labour organizer suggests that NGOs would no longer be needed in an organizing role once workers develop the capacity to establish effective unions with wide grassroots support.[32]

It is perhaps significant that unofficial organizing vehicles such as these do not have a prominent role in Malaysia. This simultaneously demonstrates the degree to which state-labour relations have been more institutionalized in that country and the resultant lack of political space to carry out challenges to state power outside of formal institutions. Though never particularly effective, challenges to state power from outside of formal institutions were a feature of state-labour relations in Indonesia, even at the height of Suharto's powers.

Thus, in the more industrialized Greater Jakarta/West Java area, groups such as KABI *(Kesatuan Aksi Buruh Indonesia),* KOBAR *(Komite Buruh untuk Aksi*

Reformasi) and JEBAK *(Jaringan Buruh Antar Kota)* emerged with the aim of forming new unions with a strong grassroots base. KABI was instrumental in forming the *Serikat Buruh Jabotabek,* a union based in the Jakarta/Bogor/Tangerang/Bekasi area. JEBAK, though strongest in the industrial areas surrounding Bandung, has also developed pockets of support in Greater Jakarta as well as many outlying regions. KOBAR had links with former PPBI-trained activists and maintained a close relationship with groups of radical students, mainly in Jakarta. It has more recently been instrumental in the formation of a new national front of independent organizing vehicles. The *Front Nasional Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia* (National Front for Indonesian Labour Struggle), as it is called, consists of organizations representing Jabotabek, Medan, Bandung, Solo, Semarang, Surabaya, Manado, and Ujung Pandang.[33] Again in Jakarta/West Java, a union of shoe factory workers, Perbupas (*Persatuan Buruh Pabrik Sepatu,* Shoe Factory Workers' Union), was established, with rank-and-file leadership, though it is closely associated with a major labour-based NGO, SISBIKUM (*Saluran Informasi dan Bimbingan Hukum,* Channel for Information and Legal Assistance).[34] Evolving out of this and similar arrangements, has been a union federation called *Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia* (Alliance of Indonesian Labour Union). In Medan, a union called Serikat Buruh Medan Independen has been established, mainly led by retrenched workers, with some assistance from local NGO activists. Similar networks of worker groups exist in East Java and South Sulawesi also. In Surabaya, a small labour union, the *Serikat Buruh Reformasi* (SBR, Labour Union for Reform), has been formed out of one of these networks.[35]

Clearly, however, all these new organizations do not yet present profound problems in terms of maintaining industrial order or political stability. They have also yet to demonstrate that their presence enhances the bargaining position of workers *vis-à-vis* state and capital. Nevertheless, they arguably benefited from a situation in 1998–9 when the government of President Habibie was eager to establish its reformist credentials.[36] This was indicated when businessman-turned-Minister of Manpower in the Habibie cabinet, Fahmi Idris, quickly enacted a decision to raise the minimum wage by 15 per cent, overturning a prior wage freeze called by his immediate predecessor, Theo Sambuaga (March-May 1998). In Jakarta the minimum monthly wage was set at Rp 198,500, though at exchange rates prevalent in August 1998 this represented a mere US$14.10.[37] In February 1999, the government announced yet another minimum wage hike, setting the level at Rp 231,000 (then equivalent to US$26) in the Jakarta area.

Idris also tried to rectify Indonesia's international image in the labour area. Thus, he ensured that Indonesia finally ratified the ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize. At the same time, he announced ministerial decisions, that while stipulating strict regulations about the registration of unions at all levels with the Department of Manpower, in theory provide greater room for the legal establishment of labour unions.

Despite these reforms, repressive measures continued to be used quite freely against workers and therefore find expression in the creative production of the worker-poets analyzed in Chapter 7. Mass demonstrations planned by KOBAR and SBSI-linked workers in Jakarta in mid-1998, which combined traditional welfare demands with those on broader political reforms, were greeted with violence and intimidation by the Jakarta military command.[38] Later, workers from Tyfountex, a partly Hong Kong-owned factory in Solo, Central Java, were beaten by security personnel in Jakarta during a failed attempt to bring their wage-related grievances to the ILO representative.[39] In February 1999, 20,000–25,000 workers at the Maspion factory in Surabaya, a producer of household goods, were engaged in a tenday strike, which resulted in the arrest of students and workers accused of agitation.

In spite of the above reforms and renewed stimulus to organize, one factor constraining labour to develop into a more effective force is the inability of its active groups to forge greater levels of cooperation. This is partly a legacy of the important role played by sometimes mutually competing NGOs involved in the labour movement.[40] For example, some sort of 'umbrella grouping' or even 'confederation' of independent unions, at least embracing some of the major organizations, would certainly be a more effective vehicle than a host of small unions working in an uncoordinated manner. Nevertheless, what are sometimes petty rivalries between different labour groups make the latter prospect the more likely one, in spite of some efforts undertaken to encourage more unity. The labour activist Rahman suggests that some labour groupings can work together, but largely on the basis of particular issues, than any more permanent framework.[41]

While the existence of an array of unofficially recognized organizing vehicles without clear structures may have been advantageous in dealing with state repression in the past, it remains to be seen whether it can become the basis upon which more sophisticated vehicles can develop in post-Suharto Indonesia. It must be remembered that even in Thailand, where the labour movement has better survived long periods of repression, excessive fragmentation has arguably undermined the labour cause. According to Brown, as many as eighteen labour federations and eight labour centres existed there in 1994, thus allowing for a government strategy to curb the influence of labour by encouraging rivalry between different labour organizations, especially with regard to the privilege of sitting on tripartite bodies (Brown 1997:172–3). In Malaysia, as mentioned earlier, a government strategy used to keep the MTUC pliant has involved giving encouragement to such organizations as CUEPACS and the MLO, as well as Japanese-style in-house unionism. Thus, labour organizations in Malaysia—though more highly institutionalized than in Indonesia—remain equally weak, fragmented and ineffective (Kuruvilla 1995:55, 57).

Not surprisingly, the labour movements in each of these countries have had very little influence in the formulation of policy to deal with economic crisis. In Malaysia, while expressing its support for the economic recovery plan of the Mahathir government, the MTUC only cautiously urged it to take steps to reduce

inflation, increase employment, and introduce new social safety net schemes. It also urged the government to maintain wages by ratifying and implementing internationally recognized labour standards and allowing greater freedom for unions to bargain, and for the right to strike (Chandran 1998). While carefully worded statements conveying these messages may represent quite a significant development in the Malaysian context, the weakness of organized labour over several decades has ensured that the Mahathir government has not been hard pressed to respond.

But labour activists in Indonesia are even more badly placed to influence government policy, apart from maintaining enough pressure so that periodic minimum wage increases continue to take place. They have also had little impact on formulating the current political opposition's agenda of reform, as pointed out earlier, mainly in the hands of middle class politicians and intellectuals with few organic links to the labour movement. Indeed, excessive fragmentation has meant that no labour grouping has the 'authority' to negotiate on behalf of workers with the array of forces involved in contesting political power after Suharto. Thus, labour alliances with reformist sections of the middle class have been confined to very limited segments of the NGO and student movements.

Instructively, none of the major political parties currently have a distinctly pro-labour agenda or identity. At the same time workers have showed little disposition to support the labour parties that contested parliamentary elections in June 1999 —including Muchtar Pakpahan's National Labour Party. For the time being the attention of workers and labour activists seems to be focused on the development of effective union organizations. As one worker and activist commented:

> It is not the labour party that establishes the labour union, but the labour union that must form the labour party. It should be that way.… [If not so] who will the labour party fight for? So we have to form a labour union, not a labour party first.[42]

Implicit in this view is the idea that Indonesia's labour movement is not sufficiently strong to spawn a labour party that could legitimately be regarded as being accountable to the worker rank-and-file and become a means of effective struggle.[43]

Meanwhile the New Order's main instrument to pre-empt independent organizing, the FSPSI, has itself been undergoing a process of disintegration. Soon after the fall of Suharto, eleven of the thirteen industry-based unions that comprise it announced the withdrawal of their support for the organization's central board, thus leaving it a largely useless shell. Although the FSPSI's monopoly on labour 'representation' has unravelled, it is significant that the unions that have bothered to register with the government continue to complain about obstruction encountered on the ground when establishing enterprise-level branches.[44] Significantly, KOBAR, among the most radical of the new labour organizations, was denied registration in 1999 (ACILS 1999:18).

Essentially, while the institutional arrangements of state-labour relations as constituted under Suharto have unravelled significantly, there is little to suggest that workers are presently capable of developing the organizational capacity to ensure that the direction of economic, social and political change is attuned to their interests, The labour situation is perhaps indicative of Indonesia's condition more generally, immediately after the fall of Suharto; although much of the 'Old' is unsustainable at this juncture, it is not as yet being fundamentally replaced by the 'New'. This is due to the weakness of forces representing profound change and renewal, and the capacity of elements within the New Order's vast network of patronage to reconstitute themselves within a more open and decentralized political format which itself is still being contested and configured.[45]

Prospects

It will take more time before the new opportunities presented to Indonesian workers in the area of organizing—if they persist—provide concrete results in improving the conditions of life and work of the rank-and-file worker. It will take even longer before they can possibly enable workers to impose their own agenda on state and capital through the instrument of an effective, strong labour movement. Perhaps an observation once made about the Philippines labour movement in the 1960s could be justifiably transposed to Indonesia in the present. According to Carroll, the labour movement in the Philippines could then afford to be 'relatively free', because it was 'weak', and 'free from government domination' because it was 'divided' (Carroll 1961). If such a transposition is justified, we can expect the labour movement in Indonesia to be ignored for the time being by the major contending forces, due to its lack of organizational muscle and mobilizational capabilities.[46]

The above analysis has also shown that Indonesia has largely conformed to the experiences of late industrializing countries in Asia that have been characterized by the presence of an 'exclusionary' form of accommodation between state, capital and labour. Divergences encountered between the cases of Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrate some of the possible different ways that this political exclusion of labour can be practised. In Indonesia the practice has involved more outright coercion, violence and brutality against workers. In Malaysia, the practices involved in keeping workers' organizations weak have been much more regularized and institutionalized, though violence and intimidation are also not unheard of. A major factor accounting for this difference was the legacy left by the colonial states of the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya, in relation to the survival of militant labour movements associated with the Left at the time of independence. Nevertheless, the underpinnings of this political exclusion have been similar. They include the violent containment of radical streams of the labour movement prior to rapid industrialization, though nothing on the scale of 1965–6 in Indonesia occurred in Malaysia, and late industrialization taking place in an international context is generally unfavourable to labour movements. These have

given rise to social and political constellations characterized by the weakness of organized labour and its subordination to state power.

In any case, it appears that Indonesian—and plausibly Malaysian— workers are in a different historical trajectory than, for example, their counterparts in Europe. The constellation of domestic social and political forces, the timing of industrialization, and the implications of the way in which late industrializing countries are integrated with the globalized economy obstructs the development of an accommodation between state, capital and labour that is social democratic in character. In Malaysia, rapid industrialization accompanied by the tightening of labour markets has not transcended the legacy of lost struggles of the past and the effects of an unfavourable contemporary international economic context. In Indonesia, a situation that may prevail for some time involves prolonged, inconclusive tension between contradicting tendencies for control and independent organizing, with labour still finding trouble imposing itself on ruling coalitions being reconstituted within a new, more decentralized, post-Suharto political configuration.[47] In the longer term, continuous efforts at developing the capacity for self-organization remain indispensable if workers are to have any influence at all on the way that the wider social, political and economic environment is shaped.

Notes

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1 Four ostensibly labour-based parties contested Indonesian parliamentary elections in June 1999, though all were to fare dismally.

2 In the 1940s and 1950s, the militant stream of the labour movement in Malaysia was spearheaded by ethnic Chinese communists—and indeed the largest proportion of the working class were Chinese and Indian, while Malays predominantly worked in the agricultural sector. Significantly, sustained industrialization has altered the communal balance within the working class. In 1990, 48.5 per cent of those employed in ‘working class’ occupations were Malays, compared to 26.5 per cent in 1957 (Crouch 1996:182–5). Nevertheless, the trade union movement has failed to keep up with the rapid growth of wage labour and the more balanced ethnic composition of the workforce. Many non-Malays feel that government policy has disadvantaged them, and Indian trade union leaders have felt threatened by the growing number of Malay workers and the concomitant pressure of allowing them into the leadership of the movement (Jomo and Todd 1994:129–30). The new urban working class in Indonesia is focused on new industrial centres around major cities, especially in Java but also in other regions such as North Sumatra and South

Sulawesi. In new industrial areas that attract migrants from a multiplicity of regions, such as those in West Java, regional and other affiliations will remain salient (Athreya 1998).

3 These are not exhaustive categories. It is not possible to discuss this framework in detail in the present chapter. See Hadiz (1997, especially ch. 2) for a more thorough elaboration of what immediately follows in this section.

4 See Kapstein (1996) and Moody (1997) for good, though substantially different discussions of the subject.

5 On the role of labour in democratization, see Rueschemeyer *et al.* (1992).

6 These statements are of course generalizations. For more of the nuances of the different experiences, see Hadiz (1997: ch. 2).

7 Hirst and Thompson (1996), for example, remain sceptical about the scope and novelty of economic globalization and the extent to which it has left national economies and states at the mercy of uncontrollable global market forces (Hirst and Thompson 1996: ch. 1). Rather than being completely subordinated by these forces, Weiss argues that some states actually have the capacity to exploit opportunities presented by the process of economic globalization, pointing in particular to the case of East Asian states before the late 1990s economic debacle (Weiss 1998).

Petrella (1996:28), on the other hand, argues that economic globalization is a new phenomenon, 'putting an end to the *national* economy and national capitalism as the most pertinent and effective basis for the organization and management and production of wealth'. He also contrasts 'globalization' to 'internationalization', which he suggests is an older process, merely referring to the 'ensemble of flows of exchanges' of raw materials, products, services and the like, between nation-states. But it is Strange (1996) who most strongly argues that economic globalization caused the dramatic 'retreat of the state' in presiding over national economies and societies, in favour of non-state actors such as international cartels.

8 In the first place, these migrant workers are not allowed to join unions.

9 Nevertheless, Luddism and Chartism did develop in nineteenth-century Britain in the context of acute unemployment. Moreover, economic insecurity provided 'the mainstay of support for the German Communist Party (KPD) between the wars' (Geary 1981:16), and influential labour movements emerged in the first half of this century in some Latin American countries in the context of unfavourable labour market conditions.

10 Jomo argues that an obsession with international competitiveness has resulted in efforts to reduce the cost of labour and increased official hostility toward unions. The promotion of flexible production systems has been part and parcel of developing a more liberalized investment climate in Malaysia (Jomo 1993:3–4).

11 Jessop (1999:37) also argues that national states remain key players even with the onslaught of globalization. But it is Weiss (1998) who most strongly argues against dismissive treatments of the state.

12 Interview with Arist Merdeka Sirait, leader of the NGO SISBIKUM (25 October 1998).

13 For example, non-communist labour unionists were dispatched to Europe in 1969 to convince foreign investors that it was now 'safe' to come to Indonesia, as workers had become 'patriots bound to national interests' (*Nusantara,* 30 July 1969).

14 There had been ninety strikes in Malaysia in 1968, compared to twenty-six the previous year (Jomo and Todd 1994:51).

15 See Tedjasukmana (1958) for a mapping of the different labour organizations and their political affiliations and ideologies in the 1950s. This mapping largely held true till 1965.
16 If the PKI had SOBSI, the Masyumi (the party of *Muslim petit bourgeoisie*) had the GASBIINDO as its labour arm. Likewise the Indonesian National Party (PNI) had at least two labour federations associated with it, while the Nahdlatul Ulama, the rural Java-based Islamic party, had the SARBUMUSI. For a discussion, see Tedjasukmana (1958).
17 Sudomo as quoted by the newspaper *Sinar Harapan* (27 November 1985).
18 Interview with Sudomo, 9 May 1994.
19 A translation of this questionnaire was published in *Inside Indonesia* (8 October 1986, p. 8).
20 Unlike in Singapore for example, where NTUC officials have gone on to become key government and PAP (People's Action Party) leaders, An exception to the general rule emerged, however, with the appointment of Bomer Pasaribu, former FSPSI chair, as Minister of Manpower in October 1999.
21 As suggested by Premesh Chandran, MTUC research officer. Interview, 4 August 1999.
22 According to labour activist Arist Merdeka Sirait, they were not ready for Suharto's sudden fall. Interview, 25 October 1998.
23 Interview with Saufee Mu'ain, senior official in the Malaysian Department of Labour, 4 August 1999. It is arguable that official retrenchment figures would be higher if these non-renewed contracts were taken into account.
24 The crisis has crippled hundreds, if not thousands, of local businesses. Labourintensive, export-oriented manufacturing firms have shed their workforces as scores of factories either closed down or reduced production levels because of the spiralling costs of imported raw material and equipment. Moreover, up to the end of March 1998, 1 million workers had lost their jobs in the construction and property sector. Indonesia's troubled banking sector had also eliminated at least 50,000 of its workers, due largely to the closure of many banks and forced efficiency measures. The mass exodus of multinational firms following the eruption of the May riots (see Chapter 6) must also have contributed to Indonesia's already long unemployment lines.
25 See *Kobar* (1998), the theme of which was labour and the democratic struggle.
26 Various informal discussions with workers and labour activists from the Jakarta/Bogor/Tangerang/Bekasi industrial area after the fall of Suharto. Most of these took place in June-August 1998.
27 Interview, 7 October 1998. Masduki was head of the labour division of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute.
28 However, some workers expressed to the author a disappointment at the cool reception they allegedly received from some students when they went to the MPR building during the last moments of Suharto's rule.
29 Interview with Sister Vincentia, 16 October 1998.
30 The Department of Manpower Statistics, from which these figures are taken, are notably conservative, and the actual number of strikes may be higher.
31 Interview with Sister Vincentia, 16 October 1998.

32 Interview with Rahman, 11 December 1998. A former worker and activist of the NGO, *Yayasan Bakti Pertiwi,* be was instrumental in the formation of the new union, *Serikat Buruh Jabotabek*.
33 Personal communication with Romawaty Sinaga, KOBAR organizer, 22 July 1999.
34 Interviews with Aang Darmawan Saputra, chairman of SERBUPAS, 25 October 1998; and Arist Merdeka Sirait, SISBIKUM leader, 25 October 1998.
35 Discussion in Jakarta with Surabaya factory worker and SBR member, 2 July 1998.
36 The labour activist Rahman suggests that worker protests and demonstrations, as a result of the *Reformasi* environment, could be undertaken more freely than before. Interview, 11 December 1998.
37 Indeed, government officials acknowledge that the increase would do little to help workers cope with the expected inflation rate of at least 80 per cent in 1998. It is estimated that the new minimum wage would only cover 75.8 per cent of the 'minimum physical needs' of a worker, compared to 95.32 per cent before the economic crisis. See *Jakarta Post,* 1 July 1998, p. 1.
38 See Sia R News Service On-line, 26 June 1998.
39 See *Xpos* On-line, 35/1, 29 August-4 September 1998, for an account of the events.
40 For an elaboration on this matter, see Hadiz (1997, especially ch. 7).
41 Interview, 11 December 1998. However, two unions linked to the Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI)—the PPMI and GASPERMINDO—have formed a loose confederation with a revived version of the old Masyumi-based GASBIINDO, headed by former state unionist Agus Sudono. Like Sudono, the leaders of the PPMI and the GASPERMINDO are allies of Habibie. Other organizations, such as KOBAR and KABI, and PERBUPAS, have undertaken joint actions as ASBI, the Indonesian Labour Solidarity Action, but the latter remained an *ad hoc* grouping. PERBUPAS chairman Aang Darmawan Saputra, himself a shoe factory worker who was retrenched, wants ASBI to remain an unstructured grouping. Interview, 25 October 1998.
42 Interview with Aang Darmawan Saputra, 25 October 1998.
43 A similar view is expressed by the activist Rahman. Interview, 11 December 1998.
44 This, for example, was a complaint of the PPMI. Interview with A. Deni Daduri, General Secretary of the PPMI, 20 November 1998.
45 This theme is discussed in Robison and Hadiz (forthcoming).
46 This occurs, in spite of such developments as the establishment of the PPMI by elite-connected activists, perhaps as equally interested in political thuggery as in co-opting labour (Hadiz 1999).
47 This process of reconstitution is analyzed in Robison and Hadiz (forthcoming).

5
Islamization and democratization in Malaysia in regional and global contexts

Norani Othman

Introduction

The role of Islam in the politics of Muslim countries underwent momentous change in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Since the 1970s, many Islamic groups and movements have played a significantly political, reactive, and sometimes militant role within the nation-state. These new Islamic associations and movements appealed strongly to young professionals and university students in urban centres. The Islamic renewal or resurgent movements reflected the dual aspirations of many Muslims throughout the world. First, they sought freedom of expression and greater participation in the political process of their respective states. Second, they wanted their societies to be more explicitly identifiable as Islamic, culturally and politically.

Many Islamic movements rejected the existing state structure and political system of their countries. It was commonly believed that the existing system was a legacy of colonial rule and the imposition of a 'Western model' of governance onto a predominantly Muslim country. Among these movements, many called for the establishment of an Islamic state. They believed that only such a state could solve the problems of Muslim nations by purifying society, promoting cultural progress and providing justice for all. The establishment of an Islamic state based on the *shari'a* (Islamic law)[1] was often the primary objective. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the state in many Muslim countries had to come to terms with the growing political demands of Islamist movements.[2]

By the late 1990s, other social groups and organizations in Muslim countries responded in different ways to the political conditions and issues that Islamic resurgence movements had brought about. For example, in July 1998 a group made up of Turkey's writers, artists and democracy activists met at a workshop in Abant on the theme 'Islam and Secularism' and arrived at a proclamation claiming among other things that Islam had a public role to play and was compatible with democracy without undermining the secular state of Turkey.[3] For this group, the democratization of society must include the creation of a democratic space that allows for greater freedom of religion within the secular state. Presumably, these activists felt that the only way to respond to the mounting

challenges of the Islamist movement in Turkey was not through an inflexible and aggressive assertion of secularism but through the process of democratization whereby a space is created for the debate and negotiation of the public and political roles of the religion.

In Washington, DC in May 1999, a group comprising Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, thinkers and academics, who were either residents or citizens of the USA, established the Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID).[4] Some of this organization's objectives are:

> to promote democracy in the Muslim world; to promote a better understanding and a common platform between supporters of democracy and human rights and the proponents of the 'Islamic solution' in the Muslim world; and to encourage attempts in the West, and particularly the United States, to play a positive role in promoting democracy in the Muslim world and establishing a constructive dialogue and engagement with Muslim people.

On 8 July 1999, a large number of Iranian students calling for political reforms staged a peaceful pro-democracy protest and demonstration in Teheran seeking greater press freedom soon after the banning of a newspaper that had been very critical of the Islamic government of Iran. This demonstration later led to violent protests that reflected the tensions between the 'reformist' and the 'conservative' forces in the country. A new struggle for change and liberalization within Iran had been unleashed. The final vote count announced on 26 February 2000 for the Iranian general election held two weeks earlier showed the reformists allied to President Mohammad Khatami firmly in control of the parliament. The results announced by the official Islamic Republic News Agency indicated that 'anti-reform conservatives' had lost the majority for the first time since the Islamic revolution in 1979.

Diverse groups of Muslims living under different political circumstances such as Turkey, Iran and the USA demonstrated their concern and awareness of the relevance of democracy as central if not crucial to the political life of Muslims. The prospects of democracy as exemplified by these three different contexts was to some degree defined by the two sets of aspirations and demands that confronted Muslims at the end of the twentieth century: to abide by Islam faithfully as a way of life and to be part of the modern world. Such a situation implies that civil society in Muslim countries therefore faces two key tasks. Firstly, the challenge of ensuring that democracy is somehow maintained if not developed further within the existing state and polity. Secondly, these countries take on the urgent work of engaging with Islamists and the nature of the polity and democracy that is implicit in their blueprint of the Islamic state.

The Islamic state by all accounts seems to consist of constitutional features that are problematic if not conflicting with the criteria of modern democracy. Within Islamist movements or among Muslims generally, there is neither consensus nor

clear definition of what constitutes an Islamic state. Nevertheless, the role of Islam and the question of an 'Islamic state' define a significant part of everyday political debates and contestations among Muslims in Southeast Asia.

The Asian economic crisis of 1997 had unprecedented political repercussions. The wave of demonstrations that emerged in 1998–9 in Malaysia and Indonesia calling for *Reformasi* or political reforms strongly reflected the rise of aspirations to greater freedom and democratization (see Chapter 1). The relationship between Islam and the prospects of democratizing movements has been intertwined with the dominant political culture in Malaysia and Indonesia since independence. Notably, both nation-states have had long-standing authoritarian governments and styles of political leadership that may be described as autocratic if not feudal. By virtue of the Muslim majority in the two countries, Malaysia and Indonesia have had to contend with political challenges that either advocate for an Islamic state or, at the very least, greater Islamization of state and society.

The focus of this chapter is on Islamization and democratization in Malaysia. Where relevant, the country's experiences are compared and contrasted with developments in Muslim societies around the world and the Southeast Asian region —primarily Indonesia. The chapter explores in particular the role of Muslim politics in a multi-ethnic country such as Malaysia and the consequences of the Islamization promoted by both the government and the opposition. Islamization has been advanced by both the long-standing ruling coalition *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) led by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) as well as the opposition Islamist party *Partai Islam SeMalaysia* (PAS, the All-Malaysia Islamic Party). The latter is the sole Muslim opposition party in Malaysia and is politically dominant in two eastern states of Peninsular Malaysia: Kelantan and Terengganu. The principal Islamization policies introduced by UMNO since the 1980s were the expansion of both civil and criminal *shari'a* laws as well as the amendments to the Muslim family laws in the thirteen states and three federal territories (Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan) that constitute the Federation of Malaysia. Some of these laws include the 1995 enactments that allow for the automatic enforcement into law of relevant *fatwa*[5] (learaed opinions) issued by state *mufti* (religious officials) and the Fatwa Councils of most states. Changes in the Muslim family laws and their administration in several states after 1980 affected women's rights and gender equality in significant ways.

This chapter examines the implications of the above laws on constitutionalism, the democratic process and gender rights. Islamic political issues are studied in relation to the prospects and development of democracy generally, and the existing initiatives towards democratization by political parties or emergent civil society organizations specifically. The main purposes here are to evaluate whether the democratization project will be affected in any significant way in the near future, and to examine whether within the various Muslim movements one can find any significant potential or initiative for an Islam-based democratization that promotes tolerance and respect for pluralism within the Muslim community itself as well other religious communities in the nation-state.

Democracy, democratization and pluralism in the modern nation-state

Human society needs some form of authority or government that has the necessary powers to maintain law and order and regulate political, economic and social activities. It is within the structure and organization of the state the distribution and exercise of its powers and related matters—that the relationship between private persons and the official organs of the state is determined. To avoid the dangers of the corruption and abuse of power and to ensure that the powers of government are properly employed to achieve their legitimate objectives, the structure and functioning of government must be regulated by clearly defined and strictly applied rules. This body of rules is referred to as the constitution of the state. The constitution and the laws of that state are the framework for official action affecting individual and collective fundamental rights and liberties within the state.

Representative government based on universal suffrage is another necessary feature or condition of modern constitutionalism. In one sense, constitutionalism is the principle for organizing government according to law, limiting the functions of its different departments and prescribing the extent and manner of the exercise of sovereign power. The principle of constitutionalism and the rule of law are two important criteria for a political democracy. Policies are formulated and laws and regulations enacted in order to promote the objectives of justice, individual liberties, social equality, political stability, economic growth and the equitable distribution of wealth. All these objectives of good governance also involve the continuing and delicate adjustment of competing interests and constantly shifting priorities (An-Na'im 1990, especially ch. 4).

Within this framework of constitutional government, democracy in essence simply means the substantive participation of people in ruling themselves and the recognition for the rights of all within the same polity. This in principle implies some limitation of government dominance over crucial aspects of social life, especially those related to the freedom, basic rights and civil liberties of citizens and groups in the state. The term 'democratization' is often used to refer generally to the demand for empowerment and participation in government and politics by the citizens of a state with a recognition of the rights and civil liberties of other constituent members of the state. The demand for freedom of expression and greater participation may be made by political parties, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other civil society groups and social movements.

The modern democratic state with a constitutional government is also predicated on the principle of equality of all its citizens before the law, without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion. Almost every state in the world today may be said to be pluralistic in nature, comprising of multi-ethnic and multireligious communities as its subjects. The notion and pursuit of equality and social justice in the context of a

state in which difference and pluralism are present become all the more complex and problematic.

Pluralism is a significant normative issue related to democracy and the problems and prospects of democratization. Certain basic principles of democratic procedures need to be in place in order for a state or society to accommodate cultural differences. Michael Walzer (1995) refers to the 'non-discrimination principle' as a model for accommodating cultural pluralism in a state. He also proposes the 'group rights model' which involves measures aimed at protecting or promoting ethno-cultural identity. Some of these measures include freedom of religion, language rights, land claims, regional autonomy and guaranteed representation. Democracy and pluralism are indeed relevant to the politics, society and culture of both Malaysia and Indonesia. The central position of Islam in the two countries only underscores the complexity of day-to-day efforts in resolving disputes or differences concerning democracy and pluralism as procedure and ideology.

In contemporary discourses of democracy, one finds that the problem of democratization is conceptualized as a national problem above all. In studying the impact of Islamization on democratization in newly industrialized countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, one must consider the complexity and problem of politics and culture in each society as a whole. The advancing process of Islamization affects and is affected by the larger context of mainstream or so-called 'secular' national political culture. Malaysia saw the emergence of Islamic organizations or movements such as *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia), *Darul Arqam,*[6] and *Jemaah Islah Malaysia* (JIM, Malaysian Society for Reform) that sought the re-assertion of the Islamic character and identity of the social and political life of Malaysian Muslims. The common feature of their Islamizing tendencies was to elevate the status of Muslim values, practices and laws in all possible areas of life. They shared the rationale that Islam was the only possible solution to address almost all the problems faced by the Muslim *ummah* (community). For many members or supporters of these movements, Malaysia was well-situated to undertake an Islamization project partly because the country had achieved the necessary economic development to enable many of its Muslim citizens to acquire a higher education. Young Muslims in Malaysia were seen to be appropriate conveyors of Islamization, as one ABIM academic observes:

> After all, we now have a sufficient number of people among the *ulama*[7] scholars, jurists, and even professionals who are all well-versed in the various disciplines of Islamic knowledge. These are the new generation of Muslims who are experts and well-placed to develop an Islamic way of life for our modern world.[8]

The homogeneity in the approaches to Islamization of most Malaysian associations and movements is another feature that will affect the prospects of

democratization in the near future, especially in matters concerning the role of the citizenry as well as, the civic responsibility and participation of modern Muslims in matters of religion and public life.

In contrast to Malaysia, there is in Indonesia a plurality of Islamic movements comprising differentiated and diverse perspectives on Islam as religion, the Islamic state and the way to actualize Islam and its principles in public life. Islamization in Indonesia differs remarkably as a result. The Islamization discourse of different organizations such as the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU, Association of Islamic Scholars), *Muhammadiyah* or *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* (ICMI, Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals) is far more open and progressive, allowing for different opinions on the kind of Islam and its political role in Indonesia. Freedom of expression in religious matters does not exist in Malaysia. In 1986, for example, Kassim Ahmad's book-length critique of the *hadith* (narratives of the utterances and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) was banned by the Malaysian government. At the same time, public debate on the *hadith* has never been constrained in Indonesia. On the contrary, compared to Malaysia, Muslim intellectual culture in Indonesia has been active and democratic, especially so in the final days of the New Order.

Islam and democracy

The rise of Islamic resurgence movements and debates about democratization may seem at first to be in conflict or contradictory to each other. In fact, a number of observers view religious resurgences, especially fundamentalist ones, to be anti-democratic. Such religious movements are often seen to be traditionalizing, backward-looking, and fearful of change and democracy itself. Fatima Mernissi, for example, in her book *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (1993) argues that Muslims in the Arab world 'do not so much have a fear of democracy as suffer from a lack of access to the most important advances of recent centuries, especially tolerance as principle and practice' (1993:42). Freedom of thought, freedom to differ and individualism were sacrificed to save unity of the religious group or the *ummah.* Quoting Hunter (1991) and Djait (1991), Mernissi asserts that:

> Arabs never had a systematic access to the modern advances rooted in the legacy of the Enlightenment, an ideological revolution that led to the debunking of medieval and reformational cosmologies and the undermining of feudal forms of political authority and theistic forms of moral authority. …Muslims did not think of the phenomenon of modernity in terms of rupture with the past, but rather in terms of a renewed relation with the past.
>
> (Mernissi 1993:46–7)

Many other Muslim intellectuals and activists argue otherwise. Although it may be a practice 'foreign' to contemporary Muslims, the notion or concept of

democracy is really not foreign to Islamic thought (Osman 1994, 1996; Kamali 1994, 1999a, 1999b). A number of activists in the human rights and democracy movements throughout the Muslim world are well aware that various principles of democracy are inherent to the corpus of Islamic ideals and thought. Muslims, they further argue, need to develop some of these principles in practice within modern or existing political systems. Democracy is not a given heritage in Islam. For some modernist and activist Muslims, the idea of democracy has to be substantiated and actively promoted through educational reform and the creation of social institutions that foster democratic consciousness and encourage greater participation of civil society in the political and religious realm.

The major challenge for democratization in Muslim societies remains whether Muslim scholars and leaders themselves are able to create coherent theories and structures of Islamic democracy that are not simple reformulations of Western notions offered in Islamic idioms (Esposito 1996). What the social and political content of Islamic democracy consists of, and how it is to be justified and realized, was increasingly a central issue to the project of Islamic modernity throughout the Muslim world in the twentieth century. Muslim historical and civilizational heritage is richly endowed with a variety of political traditions and cultures of its own, all elaborated in quite distinctive political and historical experiences. That heritage may provide the necessary resources and strong historical support for modern efforts to generate from within Islam itself the idea of a committed, ethically driven life of active, participatory citizenship and a universal or global Islamic *ummah-ship*.

Islamic resurgence in the late twentieth century brought about considerable transformation of the key players in realpolitik. It provided a range of possibilities for Islamic movements to attain political power and influence within the lifetime of one generation of the world's Muslim population, particularly those who were born between 1945 and the 1950s. This was also the generation of Muslims who in their early adult years (in the 1970s) had to confront the post-colonial agenda of development within their respective newly independent nation-states.

The final two and a half decades of the twentieth century witnessed the accelerated economic growth that transformed Malaysia and Indonesia into newly industrializing countries as their economies greatly benefited from late capitalism and the early stages of economic globalization in the 1980s. The economies of both countries expanded at an accelerated rate until the fateful Asian financial crisis struck in the latter half of 1997. This period of economic prosperity, however, did not see a decline in the dominance of Islamic groups and parties as a force in the national politics of both countries. Whether it was the developmentalist programme of Suharto's 'New Order' or Mahathir Mohamad's 'Vision 2020', the two leaders had to contend with the political challenges of Islamic constituencies. Malaysia and Indonesia experienced the specific and local impact of the ascendancy of Islamic revivalist movements from the 1970s in other Muslim countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria and the Sudan.

Islamization affects the prospects for democracy in all these Muslim nation-states not because there is any intrinsic contradiction between Islam and democracy but because the resurgent movements of political Islam do not (or perhaps refuse to) recognize the intellectual prerequisites of reactualizing *shari'a* principles with democratic trajectories in the modern world. An examination of the experiences of these Islamist movements and their relationship with the processes of democratization, nevertheless, will show some variation in priorities and trajectories. Each case is defined by the social milieu and political circumstances of the existing nation-state. While they may be inspired by common religious traditions or conceptual and ideological Islamic resources, different national contexts give rise to variations in approaches and agendas. By the 1990s, when the Malaysian government sought to expand the implementation of Islamic civil and criminal laws for Muslims, in Indonesia the trend was to encourage the propagation of non-state Islam or the religion primarily as a source of ethical and cultural guidance, thereby restricting the role of 'political Islam'.

Islamization in Malaysia

Islamization is that process by which what are perceived as Islamic laws, values and practices are accorded greater significance in state, society and culture. It is a contemporary phenomenon partly associated with the postcolonial era and partly seen as an assertion or re-assertion of identity in response to modernization. Islamization is a quest for the Islamic ideal. It is an attempt to restore the pristine Islam perceived to be lost or disrupted as a result of Western colonial domination. The process of 'Islamization' generally and in Malaysia specifically needs to be explored as a phenomenon of social change. It can be viewed as part of a complex of responses by Muslims in order to accommodate culturally the impact of rapid and often disruptive social transformation. It is a manifestation of the encounter of Muslim societies with the West in modern times; initially under colonial domination and later the interplay between economic domination and the political and cultural resistance it generated. To understand contemporary Islamization movements, one needs to view them historically within their sociopolitical contexts (Osman 1994:123–43).

In Malaysia, Islamization policies were conscientiously undertaken by the state from the mid-1980s. Impelled by the rapid economic transformation of its economy, Malaysia sought to combine ever more comprehensive and accelerated Islamization policies with a growing middle class, modern lifestyle and material or consumer culture. The Malaysian state's Islamization project under the premiership of Mahathir was implemented under fairly considerable political pressure especially when the government found it necessary to legitimate itself as Islamic against the claims of traditionalizing or neo-traditionalist Islamic forces: the opposition Islamic party PAS and *Darul Arqam* among them.

In the period between 1982 and the middle of 1998, the roles played by the top two UMNO politicians—premier Mahathir and his deputy Anwar Ibrahim—were

crucial in shaping contemporary Malaysian understandings of how Islam, democracy and modernity were defined. Both men projected themselves as modern Muslims with the responsibility of leading Malay society and the country into the new millennium. Recognizing the need to appease the Islamic revival movements, Mahathir invited Anwar, then President of ABIM, to join UMNO. Soon after Anwar joined the ranks of the ruling coalition, the Mahathir administration began to implement various Islamization policies that included among others the crucial constitutional amendment first proposed in 1986 and then embodied in the 1988 Amendment under Article 121 (1A) of the Federal Constitution. This amendment divided the areas of jurisdiction of the Civil and the *Syariah* Courts, notably deciding substantially in the latter's favour.

Several institutions were established and vested with the power to further Islamize the law and society. *Pusat Islam* (Islamic Centre) was set up as a federal government agency and evolved from the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department. It was upgraded in 1996 to *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (JAKIM, Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia).[9] Other leading institutions established included *Yayasan Islam Malaysia* (YADIM, Islamic Missionary Foundation Malaysia), *Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia* (IKIM, Institute of Islamic Understanding) and the International Islamic University (IIU). Islamic banking began to proceed apace and by 1993 several banks in Malaysia were offering an alternative to the traditional savings account.

The 1980s saw an increased application of several amendments within the Islamic Criminal Enactments (*Shari'a* criminal laws) in most of the states of the Federation of Malaysia. An outstanding feature of this development was the prurient obsession with moral surveillance, enforcement and punitive measures against Muslims for such transgressions as eating during *Ramadhan* (the fasting month), consuming alcoholic beverages, and committing the 'sexual offence' of *khalwat* (improper covert association between sexes). The latter is defined described by JAKIM as 'close proximity between a male and female who are not *muhrim* (a relative or kin with whom one cannot marry) and not legally married'. It is not necessary for both parties to be Muslim and many cases have been taken to court since 1985 where only one of the parties is. Under a 1987 amendment, the non-Muslim partner may be detained in police custody for questioning in order to enable the Islamic authorities to gather evidence against the accused Muslim party. The freedom of a non-Muslim from the jurisdiction of Islamic laws as guaranteed by the Malaysian Constitution is thus compromised.

At the same time, throughout the 1980s some of the existing procedures or rulings within Muslim family laws were amended or reverted to earlier and more traditional interpretations of gender rights within a Muslim marriage and family. For example, the law requiring the written permission of the first wife before a Muslim male could contract a subsequent marriage was abolished. Aspects of divorce and post-divorce legal procedures for Muslim women were also amended accordingly. It was obvious that one aspect of the Islamization carried out since the mid-1980s was the introduction of patriarchal interpretations into the existing

Muslim family laws. Particular Islamic institutions and social groups in Indonesia championed patriarchy in the 1990s, though mostly through activism rather than changes to the legal system. Their opposition to Megawati Sukarnoputri's presidential aspirations because she is a woman, for instance, is discussed in Chapter 6. In keeping with state-driven Islamization in Malaysia, whatever progressive elements in the existing laws were changed or amended with the objective of increasing their 'Islamic' character by putting in place traditional forms of the *shari'a*. Muslim women's rights in the family and marriage were undermined as a result. Given the emphasis in the *shari'a* on the authority of the religious establishment over Muslim citizens, the intensification of patriarchy was not conducive to democratization.

Despite the disconcerting shifts in the legal position of Muslims, Mahathir and Anwar projected a progressive image of themselves as Islamic leaders. The former was very critical of traditionalizing Islam and in public speeches was often forthright in his criticisms of Muslim orthodoxy. The texts of these speeches were often published in the national newspapers. Anwar on the other hand had a different style and approach. In his speeches he avoided confrontation and instead focused on 'a modernizing theme' in discussing Islamic issues. It was Anwar who popularized the term *masyarakat madani* for 'civil society' in Malaysian public discourse. In most of his political speeches in 1994, Anwar Ibrahim persistently promoted the importance of *masyarakat madani* as a path for a Malaysian-style Islamic modernity and civilization. The concept was for him a way of 'rethinking and refashioning modernity' for Muslim society that would enable it to sustain and accommodate religious values as it transforms into an industrialized society.

The ensuing public discussion of the concept *masyarakat madani* was narrow in scope given the rich social and scholarly trajectories that fall under the rubric of 'civil society' (see Chapter 3). Most discussions in Malaysia formulated the notion of civility based on a religiously-defined moral consciousness and the need for society to do good and maintain political unity by supporting activities initiated by the government. Neglected was the notion of the sovereignty of the people and the need to advocate and form horizontal links through voluntary associations, informal institutions, social cooperation, trust and 'social capital' as well as promote activities that build up society rather than trickle down from governments (see Krygier 1997). The working understanding of *masyarakat madani* among ethnic Malay leaders was that civil society supports the objectives of the democratically elected government rather than fostering political autonomy and social initiatives as common practice. The autonomous character of civil society, key to its definition in Chapter 3, was absent in the political imagination of the promoters of *masyarakat madani* and points to a characteristically state-dominated and authoritarian outlook.

Unsurprisingly, the underlying assumption of the Islamization policies formulated was the legitimacy of the state and its religious authorities to unilaterally define the kind of Islam best suited to Malaysia. Islamic ideas propagated within this agenda contradicted the grand objectives of both Mahathir

and Anwar. The former's efforts to create a *Bangsa Malaysia* (the unitary nation to be realized via the Vision 2020 development programme) or the latter's hopes for a *masyarakat madani* both required certain necessary conditions. One of these conditions was a political climate which accepts dissent, critical judgement and pluralistic views as part of the democratic process of governance. The failure to recognize the need to reform the political culture within UMNO as a part of the agenda for social change and the transformation of Malaysia is another unfulfilled condition. Without these prerequisites the respective leaders' modernizing projects were highly untenable.

After Anwar was removed from his post in early September 1998, a number of unprecedented events took place over the following seven months. The street protests from September 1998 to April 1999 in Kuala Lumpur brought to the surface long-suppressed crises and tensions related to past and ongoing undemocratic actions taken by the government. The demonstrations were not only a protest movement in support of Anwar's cause but also an expression or manifestation of a deep frustration among the young with the authoritarian style of government. In the period 1982–98, there were a number of 'constitutional crises' that saw the executive undermine the independence of the judiciary and challenge the powers of the Sultan, the ruler in nine out of the thirteen states in the Federation.

A well-established and instrumental feature of the authoritarianism of the Malaysian state is the Internal Security Act (ISA) whose use is justified as ostensibly the only means of maintaining political stability. In this regard, Malaysian human rights groups have criticized the government for its shortterm perspective in addressing political developments that should be readily anticipated given the accelerated economic and social transformation. This Act was used during the infamous Operation Lallang of 1987 to 'neutralize' the political 'threat' of civil society and Islamist movements. The *Darul Arqam* was banned in 1994 and its members arrested, once again, under the ISA. The Act was used at the height of the *Reformasi* movement and well after to quell political opposition. The intermittent and habitual resort to the ISA (in 1974, 1976, 1986, 1994 and 1998) by the Malaysian state poses a great obstacle towards the democratization of the legal and constitutional bases of state and governance. The potential abuse of the law and state power remains a constant threat to the sustenance of democratizing impulses within Malaysian society.

The 'ISA mentality' also permeates the thinking of the Islamic bureaucracy in their attempts to safeguard the integrity and faith of Muslim citizens in Malaysia. Authoritarian and punitive measures in Islamic matters are often justified in the name of 'upholding the faith of Muslims in Malaysia' *('untuk mempertahankan aqidah orang Islam di Malaysia')*. The proposal (first publicly announced in 1995) to establish a 'Rehabilitation Centre' for 'Muslim deviants' (modelled after the national drug rehabilitation centre) came from *ulama* who supported UMNO as well as Islamic functionaries at the state and federal level. It was supported by many Muslim members of parliament and politicians, once again reflecting the

lack of serious thought given to the implications of such a measure on the civil liberties of citizens and on Islam as a liberating religion. A 'deviant' was defined by JAKIM to include any Muslim found guilty of propagating 'incorrect Islamic teachings'. The list of criteria and features of these apparently erroneous teachings is vague and generalized, and could easily be misused to silence discussion and debate of the legal or religious measures introduced by the state.

Following a report in the media (*Berita Harian,* 17 April 1998) that laws on apostasy were being drafted, the then Deputy President of ABIM proposed that JAKIM should organize a National Conference to discuss the matter, and involve other government bodies such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and all relevant Islamic and *dakwah* (missionary) organizations. According to the media report, the Islamic offence of *murtad* (apostasy) would be punishable with a fine of RM 5,000 (then more than US$1, 000) or a three year jail term, or both. On 23 May 1998 Abdul Hamid Othman, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Islamic Affairs) confirmed that the Apostasy Bill laws were being drawn up and were expected to be tabled in parliament the following year (*Utusan Malaysia,* 24 May 1998). The Bill, he said, would focus mainly on introducing 'preventive measures' against apostasy such as rehabilitation. These laws would also clarify a provision in the Federal Constitution that forbids the proselytization of Muslims by members of other faiths in Malaysia. Following the confirmation, Zahid Hamidi, the Head of UMNO's youth wing, expressed his support of the government's move. The progress of the Bill was nevertheless overtaken by the tumultous events of the *Reformasi* period. In July 1999, realizing that the UMNO-led government might have a change of heart about tabling the Bill, Haji Abdul Hadi Awang, then the Member of Parliament for Marang, Terengganu and the Deputy Chairman of PAS, proposed to table a private member's bill to make apostasy an offence punishable by death. The call for the death penalty was based on a *hadith* that proclaims 'Kill whomever changes his religion'.[10]

A Muslim women's group advocating an egalitarian approach to gender relationships and women's rights in Islam, Sisters In Islam (SIS),[11], with the support of the human rights NGO SUARAM (*Suara Rakyat Malaysia,* the Voice of the Malaysian People), expressed their objection to the Apostasy Bill. The joint protest claimed the Bill was un-Islamic as the religious tradition proscribed compulsion in matters of faith. Other Islamic groups were silent on this debate and did not make a public statement in response to this objection. In follow-up public statements about the apostasy laws, Abdul Hamid Othman claimed that there was no need for extreme measures against apostasy as it was not a widespread problem. Most cases apparently involved non-Malay Muslims who for various reasons revoked conversion to Islam by reverting to their previous religion or renounced Islam by way of a Statutory Declaration. Other notable figures of Islamic authority, when contacted privately for their opinion on this matter, supported the Minister's claim and insisted that the main purpose of the apostasy laws was to address the problems surrounding Muslim converts. Asked about the

argument against compulsion in Islam (Verse 2:256 of the Qur'an), they observed that it is true that the religion does not allow forced conversion, but once a Muslim, there is, it seems, no freedom to leave the faith.

The tenacity of those who supported the introduction of the apostasy laws needs some explanation here as the definition and punishment of apostates is not clear-cut in the Islamic foundational texts, and is debatable. Conflicting interpretations, questionable *hadith* (see note 10), and different legal opinions suggest that the definition of apostasy itself remains unclear. Over the centuries, leading jurists and scholars have argued that unbelieving does not merit punishment. Many argue that the call for the death penalty in the previously mentioned *hadith* refers to *hirabah,* apostasy accompanied by armed rebellion against the Muslim community and its legitimate leadership. Prominent Muslim scholars have also argued that the apostate ought to be re-invited to the faith and not be condemned to death.

According to other Muslim scholars, even though the renunciation of faith is the greatest of offences, it is a matter between man and his Creator. As such, punishment is postponed to the Day of Judgement. In all the responses of the government's Islamic authorities to the punishment by death proposed by Hadi Awang, there was a glaring absence of a publicly stated and principled position in opposition, either on the grounds of the foundational Islamic texts or constitutionalism. This was not the only instance of a disturbing lack of civil courage—institutional and individual—that prevailed among those in positions of religious authority in Malaysia. In interviews from July to October 1993 with various figures among the UMNO-backed *ulama* and Islamic functionaries over the proposed enactment of *hudud* (punishment prescribed by God) laws by the Kelantan state government, a similar situation prevailed.[12] Officers in the government's religious departments were asked for their views on the Islamic and constitutional validity of the controversial rules and laws proposed by either the government or PAS. It was evident from their responses that they greatly lacked the sensitivity, civil courage and even serious thought necessary to engage the social and political implications of the changes proposed. Some who also held political positions were often reluctant to give interviews or at best would volunteer critical opinions on the condition of anonymity. One conclusion is obvious from my observation and experience. The fear of openly challenging or debating Islamic issues with any authority (either in the government or opposition) is an indication of the 'atmosphere' of authoritarianism and hegemony created by both state and non-state religious bodies in the country.

However contradictory and problematic much of the proposed Islamizing legislation may be, each day sees the introduction of new 'Islamic rules and laws'. The process seems to continue unabated as governments, finding themselves increasingly on the defensive, seek to enhance their Islamic credentials, to be seen as at least pro-Islam if not truly Islamic themselves. In Malaysia, for example, the legal basis for the Islamization of laws (including both civil or family law and criminal law) by the government has been in many instances neither justifiable on

the grounds of Islam nor the constitution. The Malaysian government has been impelled along this path of the Islamization of the law less by abstract principles than by pragmatic imperatives. It has set this course not simply in order to counter the ideological challenge of PAS but also to compete with the various states that frequently have their own reasons for forcing the federal government's hand or outdoing its efforts at Islamization.

This problem is not unique to Malaysia. Many governments are increasingly being driven to codify, strengthen and implement by statutory means 'Islamic laws' touching ever expanding areas of life as a matter of political expediency and survival. They do so reactively and without careful consideration of the long-term consequences of their hastily devised legal improvisations. In this way, in the final decades of the twentieth century, those political elements that once proudly saw themselves as the civil guardians of modern constitutionalism and Islamic modernism have incrementally become the hostages of the very forces they once sought to resist and contain.

Many politicians and leading members of UMNO seldom articulated their own views on religious matters or questioned the proposals made by the Islamic authorities. This reluctance or fear allowed the passage of Islamic laws and rulings without the scrutiny or even the awareness of the respective state legislatures or the federal parliament. The laws passed narrowed individual human rights and were retrogressive, particularly to the democratic assumptions of the Malaysian constitution, processes that are further elaborated in the next section.

The Islamization of laws and its impact on civil rights and democracy

The Islamization project carried out in Malaysia, particularly from the 1980s, tended to focus on the area of laws or enactments and on the surveillance and compulsion of individual piety or its ritualized public expression. The distinction between the 'public' and the 'private' realms of morality and religiosity was often absent. At the same time, public freedoms and social action based on democratic consensus were not taken into any consideration. For example, the implementation of Islamic laws, particularly in the area of public laws, clearly demonstrated the absence of democratic considerations.

From 1986, most states promulgated a bundle of Muslim criminal laws whose implementation has proved to be in conflict with the constitution. One such law, for example, is Section 12 (C) of the *Selangor Syariah Criminal Offences Enactment 1995* which states the following: 'any person who acts in contempt of religious authority or defies or disobeys or disputes the orders or directions of the Sultan as head of the religion of Islam, the *Majlis Agama Islam* (Islamic Religious Council) or the *Mufti,* expressed or given by way of *fatwa* shall be guilty of an offence' (the same statement is found in Sections 9 and 12 of the *Syariah Criminal Offences Act of the Federal Territory).* Such laws certainly give wide powers to persons who are not democratically elected to make laws that are binding on the

public. In both sets of laws, it is also a criminal offence for any person to give, propagate or disseminate any opinion concerning Islamic teachings, Islamic law or any issue contrary to *any fatwa* for the time being in force. Another section of the laws (Section 36 (1) of the Administration of Islamic Law (Federal Territories Act), 1993) grants the *mufti* the sole power to amend, modify or revoke *a fatwa* issued either by him or any previous *mufti.* This again is a huge discretionary power entrusted to a religious official and at the same time a substantive exclusion of the public—Muslims of good faith—from any say in major matters affecting them (Othman 1998c).

What is pernicious about the laws is that under the Syariah Criminal Offences Act passed by most states in Malaysia, the fatwa issued by the state *mufti* is automatically given the force of law without first going through the legislative process. After approval by the State Executive Council and the Sultan, a *fatwa* apparently needs only to be gazetted to become law. It is not tabled for debate in the state legislature or the Malaysian parliament. Any violation of the *fatwa* is consequently a criminal offence; any effort to dispute the Islamic legal opinion or offer a contrary opinion is also a crim inal offence. Such provisions in effect gave an immediate binding status to *fatwa* and further sanctified them by legally preventing any potential disagreement or rejection of the opinion. Such excessive delegation of powers is indeed a violation of the constitutional trust held in the legislative bodies in the country. The situation may be likened to handing a 'blank cheque' to a bureaucratic division of government to make laws as it deems fit without any public debate.[13]

The fatwa controversy of 1997[14] highlighted the adverse legal and constitutional consequences of the delegation of excessive power to religious officials in matters of *shari'a* criminal law. The delegation of law-making in this manner has encouraged and put in place rule by decree, thereby introducing the kernel of a 'theocratic dictatorship' within the polity. As a result, the *mufti* and other state religious authorities have been turned into infallible beings and their opinions in effect have been equated with the word of God. Muslims belong to a community of faith whose proud boast for so long was the absence of intermediaries between the Almighty and the individual, as they possessed neither church nor pope. Thanks to the novel Malaysian practice, Muslims run the risk of having many popes in the form of an institutionalized and powerful non-elected body that formally claims others have no right to discuss, debate and question matters of religion (Othman 1998c).

A glimpse of the potential abuse of the considerable power of *ulama* in Malaysia is offered by an incident that hinges on the sanctity of religious *fatwa* and the proposed laws on apostasy. In August 1998, when asked his views on the impending Apostasy Bill, Prime Minister Mahathir casually remarked that he himself had been labelled an apostate by certain *mufti* because of his criticism of the enforcement of the rulings in the Islamic Criminal Enactments, in particular the arrest and handcuffing of three Muslim women in a beauty pageant the year before (cf. the *fatwa* controversy of 1997 described above; see also *The Star,* 14

and 16 August 1998). Mahathir was referring to a report in *Harakah* (the PAS newspaper) claiming the then-outgoing Selangor State Mufti Datuk Ishak Baharum had said that a person became an apostate if he rejected religious rulings. [15] The report was apparently read by Mahathir as an attack on his opposition to the actions against the participants in the beauty pageant, hence he too was labelled an apostate.

The issue was downplayed by Abdul Hamid Othman who claimed that *Harakah* had misreported the story (*The Star,* 16 August 1998:2). He added that 'it is correct to state that a Muslim becomes an apostate if he rejects the religious rulings but what Dr. Mahathir had done was (merely) to question the enforcement of (those) rulings'. Going by the press statement, there is neither intention nor political will on the part of the UMNO-led government to re-evaluate the pernicious way in which some of its Islamic laws are promulgated. The hope that some Malaysian human rights activists may have had for a governmental review of some of the laws remains unfulfilled. Clearly, the principle and spirit of democracy has been overtaken by political expediency as the government seems more committed to prove its 'Islamic credentials' through the Islamization of laws bearing on Malaysian Muslims.

Islamization and human rights

The relationship between human rights and Islam requires special treatment here because it is one of the major areas used to point out that the faith is not compatible with the Western or liberal idea of democracy. There is also a general perception that Islam and human rights are antagonistic. What is often concealed in this view is the identification of Western culture as liberal—as a result of secularism. Indeed 'the origins of the principles of human rights, at least as they are conceptualized today, is…commonly traced to two strands of Western philosophical and political thought, namely natural law and the Enlightenment' (Dalacoura 1998:40).

Muslim and non-Muslim scholars of Islam have shown that the religion is not inherently illiberal and can be reconciled at an abstract level of ideas with the principles of human rights (among others see An-Na'im 1996; Dalacoura 1998; Hassan 1996; Osman 1994; Piscatori 1980). Although it is arguably of European origin, the concept of human rights is not exclusive to Western cultures (Othman 1999a). The political record of Islam in most societies, like other religions such as Christianity and Judaism, nevertheless, does not demonstrate an exemplary human rights record over the centuries. These religions have helped to perpetuate bigotry, chauvinism and violence as much as they have served to propagate equality, liberty, justice, tolerance and fraternity. There have been many violent conflicts in which religion has played a role.

It is a somewhat simplified view to suggest that there is a widespread perception on the part of many that the normative notion of universal human rights today is in tension with the moral and cultural diversity of the world (Renteln 1990). Nevertheless, human rights do have both legal and moral dimensions that correlate

roughly with a distinction, and possible tension, between the universality of international human rights and the diversity of moral/cultural traditions. One has to be discerning and critical in order to determine whether this distinction is well-founded or stems simply from the uncritical acceptance of the political manipulation of the language of moral diversity and relativism by some governments responsible for ongoing human rights violations (Othman 1998b). At the same time, such manipulations must also be clearly distinguished from efforts by non-governmental organizations, religious leaders and private individuals to examine critically and constructively the possible tensions between the universality of human rights and strongly embedded cultural (or moral) beliefs and practices. The struggle to promote human rights is indeed not simple and is perhaps more likely to be won if fought in ways that speak to local cultural traditions (Bauer and Bell 1999).

A number of Muslim modernist scholars and activists insist that the struggle for human rights in Muslim societies world-wide requires both culturally specific and universal norms to be recognized and validated in order for an international human rights regime to be effective. One approach towards this is 'cultural mediation or both intracultural and intercultural human rights dialogues' between contested positions about Islam and human rights (An-Na'im 1999). Yet for this approach to work, one requires the 'democratic space' in which freedom of expression in religion is allowed. An integral part of the cultural mediation project involves challenging and critically questioning the dominant interpretations about the religion itself.

This returns us to the question of Islam and the democratization of Muslim societies. So long as Muslim societies such as Malaysia do not within their own systems recognize the urgent need for opening up debates and cultivating an internal discourse within Islamic civilization on the meaning and interpretation of religious texts and laws, it will not be possible for them to effectively participate in the cultural mediation of human rights with others.

Working with religious and ethnic Others nevertheless poses its own challenges. Muslim activists in Malaysia face difficulties mobilizing the active participation of non-Muslim as well as secular NGOs on questions pertaining to Islam and human rights. This 'hands-off' attitude is partly a consequence of the country's laws of sedition. Rightly or wrongly, many non-Muslims, including civil society activists, are wary of the application of anti-sedition laws to them should they question the promulgation or validity of Islamic law. As such, the sensitive nature of ethnic politics and the everyday perceptions of people in this regard is an obstacle to open debates on issues related to the constitutional and democratic validity as well as the implications of Islamic laws. The dual legal system—Islamic laws with sole jurisdiction over Muslims and the Westminster-based common laws for all domiciled in Malaysia—is another development that has encumbered the democratization process in society. The division of the citizenry through the different kinds of legal treatment to which they are subjected is a key element in

the authoritarian political cultures of Malaysia and Indonesia and is no simple matter to resolve.

The right of Muslims in Malaysia to seek the application of Islamic laws was accepted without any re-evaluation when the government began to enlarge this body of laws. Despite the problems which these laws have created in their implementation and the implications for the constitutional rights of non-Muslims as well as Muslim women, there is still no commitment on the part of the government to encourage public debate or to consider a review of these laws. In this context, the Malaysian experience does not differ from that of New Order Indonesia. In different ways in both countries, authoritarianism, with its persistent surveillance of 'freedom of speech and expression' in the interest of political survival, has greatly restrained or at times quashed the democratic impulses of its fledgling civil society movements.

Islamization and women's rights

The 'woman question' is another issue that highlights the complex interrelationship between Islamization and democratization processes. The main question in this regard is to what extent are efforts by Muslim modernists and women's groups given the space to operate—by state or non-state Islamic authorities—as they justify and ground human and gender rights arguments in non-Western terms and within Islam's own formative religious social ethic.

Muslim women face the intertwined challenges of the dominance of the state and 'political Islam' over Islamization generally as well as gender and social development specifically. These challenges are particularly evident in the generation that witnessed and experienced the *dakwah* movements of the 1970s that spread from university campuses into government institutions (Anwar 1987). Muslim women in the Southeast Asian region—Indonesia and Malaysia as well as southern Thailand and the Philippines—were socialized in cultural milieux that had fewer patriarchal institutions and practices especially when compared to South Asia or the Middle East. Their participation in work and public life was constrained by their class background rather than cultural norms. Surveys of Muslim communities in this region show in the first eighty years of the twentieth century that on average more and more Muslim women married at a much later age, made their own decision in the selection of marital partners, spent longer in schools and educational institutions and increasingly participated in their country's labour force at every level in different sectors of the economy (Jones 1994). The indicators and contexts of these statistical analyses demonstrate that the rapid modernization of their countries after the Second World War greatly affected women's lives.

Women continued in their efforts to advance their participation in every aspect of life in Malaysia at the end of the twentieth century. On 24 May 1999, a coalition of almost all of the women's groups and organizations in the country launched the joint 'manifesto', the Women's Agenda for Change (WAC), in preparation for the crucial post-Anwar general election in November 1999.[16] This movement is

compared in the following chapter to the multifarious forms of women's activism in Indonesia. Both Indonesian and Malaysian activist efforts in the 1990s involved women of all religious and ethnic backgrounds, though the former included participation across social classes more visibly than the latter. Where the two differed in strategy, however, was in the relative indifference of the Indonesians compared to Malaysians to the existing forms of political representation. In contrast to the predominant trend among their neighbours, then, WAC sought compre hensive changes in the policies, laws and regulations that have direct consequences for the status, roles and rights of women. With their experience of the post-1997 economic and political crises, women's groups needed to make politicians see that the political perspectives and needs of approximately 50 per cent of voters could not be neglected or taken for granted.

The Malaysian general election was held on 29 November 1999. The result of this election demonstrated a significant shift in the support of ethnic Malay voters away from UMNO and the *Barisan Nasional*. As WAC proponents were aware, Malay Muslim women, notably, formed some 51 per cent of registered Muslim voters. As a result, some thought went into the particular challenges faced by these voters. Muslim and non-Muslim women in Malaysia were aware that a significant common issue for them was the 'backlash effect' of religious movements and sentiments on their existing rights and status. Religious and cultural values easily undermine the effective implementation of their hard-fought social and legal reforms. This was the main anxiety expressed by the representatives of women's groups in a meeting held in late April 1999 to prepare for the launch of the WAC.

In the discussions during the meeting, it was noteworthy that Muslims and, often, non-Muslims tended to take at face value the fixed or unchanging character of key elements in the Islamic tradition. Indeed, the idea of tradition is profoundly conditioned by the central role played by both the founding texts and the *sunnah* (Prophetic example). Just as Muslims consider the Qur'an to be immutable, the *hadith* and *sunnah* are regarded as templates for action in the present. All traditions are nevertheless created through shared practice and can be profoundly and consciously modified and manipulated under the guise of a return to a more legitimate earlier practice. Of even more significance, changed economic and political conditions can profoundly alter the significance of ideas, movements, social and personal identities as well as institutional arrangements, without their proponents being fully aware of the nature of change. As a result, from Indonesia to Morocco, communities and regions assume that there is a continuity defined in Islamic terms to their way of doing things.

The conceptual framework of thought in the contemporary Islamic world may have undergone some significant changes as a result of the Islamic resurgence during the final quarter of the twentieth century. Although there is definitely no monolithic set of ideas and positions in these resurgent or revivalist movements, most of them have certainly narrowed down the choices that a modern Muslim woman may make in her private and public life. Therefore, Muslim women's groups together with modernist and reformist Muslim groups in Southeast Asia,

such as SIS in Malaysia, and *Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat* (P3M, Society for Pesantren and Community Development) and *Yayasan Kesejahteraan Fatayat* (Foundation for the Well-Being of Young Women) of the NU in Indonesia, focus their energies and activism towards the advancing of alternative voices and discourses for contemporary Muslim women. As a whole, these organizations also explore various non-governmental means to forge solidarity with other Muslim women's groups or organizations in the region. It is also an important part of their agenda to work with women's groups that focus on a wide variety of issues other than Islam. These include the non-Muslim or secular women's organizations in Malaysia: AWAM (All Women's Action Society), WAO (Women's Aid Organization), TENA-GANITA, Women's Development Collective (WDC) and WCC (Women's Crisis Centre). Although the cooperative efforts are new, they nevertheless fill an important lacuna in Muslim women's consciousness. Evidence of the possibilities (under the adverse and even dangerous conditions of declining authoritarian rule in Indonesia) and the significance of solidarity between women from different social groups in addressing the intertwined challenges of power—cultural, social, economic and political—is critically examined in the following chapter.

These activists know that Muslim women world-wide are faced with the interactions of the two forces of change that bear directly upon their lives and have been created by the way the state has advanced its economic modernization policies and its own programme of Islamization. I refer once again to the intertwined challenges of the dominance of the state and 'political Islam' over Islamization as well as gender and social development. Muslim women themselves helped either to formulate or circumscribe the question of their cultural identity on their own terms, both as followers and complementary actors in Islamic movements. Some women work as human rights activists and Muslim feminists in women's organizations to seek equal rights and challenge many of the political and religious efforts to curtail their public and domestic roles. With these experiences, Muslim women in Malaysia and Indonesia have learned to differentiate between different types of Islamization agendas within their own countries and formulate relevant responses as well as mobilize the support of other women and some men (Othman 1999b).

In the case of Malaysia, the architects of both state and non-state Islamization approaches share one thing in common. Whatever their political identification, interests or party affiliation, on the issue pertaining to women and gender rights, most are informed by 'traditionalizing' Islam or at best they conform to the 'conservative strand in Islamic thought'. One simple explanation for the similarity in their conception of Islamization and their ideas on women and women's rights is that they come from similar educational backgrounds. Their cultural reproduction has consistently featured the pre-eminence of conservative or 'neo-traditionalizing' Islamisms (Othman 1998a).

Wherever religious orthodoxy influences the political impetus to impose laws that transgress contemporary notions of women's rights and freedom, an internal

cultural and religiously informed contestation is much needed. This internal contestation needs to address problems such as the idea that human social conventions and customs truly represent the divine, and are therefore absolute and unquestionable imperatives. In the case of Islamic orthodoxy and obscurantism, this contestation has to be initiated by Muslim women themselves because it is they who often become the sites of demands by men for ensuring the continuity of traditional notions about a society's moral integrity. Of course this phenomenon is not unique to Muslim countries, in many contemporary societies such 'religious revivalism' is produced by so-called 'religious fundamentalist movements', be they Islamic, Hindu, Jewish or Christian (Othman 1999a).

Another significant aspect of the consequences of Islamic resurgence in the region was the decision of the Malaysian government to introduce new rules and a variety of amendments to existing Muslim enactments (especially the Muslim family laws) in all the states that make up the Federation. The political motivation and influence of the supporters of these Islamization policies are felt most in the arena of Muslim family and criminal law. Rulings on various aspects of the Islamic family law have gone through several amendments since the country's independence. In Malaysia especially these amendments are made according to the ebb and flow of the neo-traditionalist views of Islamist groups and the response of the state authorities themselves, particularly the federal government, in promoting their own Islamic or Islamization policies. The main motivation was to undercut the 'Islamic' credentials of PAS, which remains the main and sole Muslim opposition party in Malaysia.

The *Muslim Family Law Act of 1984 (Federal Territories)* was the outcome of deliberation and reform efforts begun in the late 1970s that were intended to provide progressive changes or reform to the existing laws. It introduced a number of important changes and tightened up various *ad hoc* administrative procedures. However, there was great resistance from the fundamentalist forces in the Malaysian Muslim community generally and from the Islamic Departments of the various states specifically. They were most concerned that secular or modern considerations in reforming or consolidating the law would replace religious imperatives as they understood them. As a result, many states were very slow in adopting or enacting the 1984 Act. When they finally did so in the years between 1989 and 1991, it was after further amendments and changes of their own. The states have autonomy in this regard, as 'Islam' was defined as a matter under the jurisdiction of each state of the federation. Some of the amendments were contrary to the original Act of 1984 in its intent and spirit, in providing rights or protection to women. The two states of Selangor and the federal territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan were the only jurisdictions that initially remained faithful to the 1984 Act. However, even in these jurisdictions—the most developed and urbanized in Malaysia—the pressure from Islamists to 'improve the Islamic character' of the laws was great. As such, several retrogressive amendments were introduced in 1988 and 1995 in Selangor, and in 1994 and 1995 in the federal territories (Othman 1998a: 178–9).

The rights and protection of Muslim women amended by the individual states were related mainly to matters of divorce, rights and claims to maintenance, custody of children upon divorce, and polygyny. Apart from the lack of uniformity among the states' Muslim Family Laws, there were other longstanding complaints from women about the problems and injustices they suffered in the *shari'a* court system. In early January 1997, in the wake of several states (including Selangor) seeking to initiate more and greater changes to their Muslim Family Laws, various women's groups in the country led by the government-sponsored National Council for Women's Organizations (NCWO), the Association of Women Lawyers (AWL) and SIS, organized a national workshop to produce two memoranda to be submitted to the federal government. The memoranda called for a review of those intended changes and sought greater reform (especially in order to remove gender bias in the interpretation and administration of the laws) and uniformity in the laws of each state. The goals here were to reform the procedure and the court system itself in order to ensure justice for both Muslim men and women.

Prior to this national workshop, SIS organized a national workshop entitled 'Islam and Women: The Question of Equality and Justice' in August 1996. Throughout 1996 and before the drafting of the two memoranda, both AWL and SIS had initiated discussions and working meetings with various leading members and representatives of nationally registered women's groups or organizations throughout the country. In addition, several members of SIS and AWL had gone out to lobby and seek the clarification and support of various members of the public. Among them were Muslim politicians (men and women), members of the Malaysian Ulama Association, Islamic legal scholars (who were not in the Islamic bureaucracy), public intellectuals, and leading members of PAS as well as the Islamic NGOs (Othman 1999b).

It was in the latter encounters that Muslim women activists were able to get their own insight of what the struggle was all about, the nature of the opposition they faced, and the intransigence of some members of the Islamists' party and groups in their views. One common characteristic among the latter was either their inability or refusal to recognize the reality of gender relations in their own contemporary society. To any argument advanced about actual situations or problems confronted by Muslim women, the response was almost always the same. The Islamists would reiterate that 'insofar as any change we as modern Muslims seek to make with our existing Islamic laws, one fact is certain, those changes must adhere to the basic tenets of the *shari'a'*.[17]

We arrive at the crux of the matter. Who defines these basic tenets and whose interpretations of basic principles should prevail? Muslim and other women's groups campaigned for the Domestic Violence Act to succeed in their efforts in 1995 only after many years of struggle. They constantly challenged and responded to those against the implementation of the Act for Muslim women. It was repeatedly asserted by the latter that: (a) the Muslim Family Laws were sufficient in providing protection to Muslim women; and (b) the right given to a wife to seek a legal action against her husband (in this case a court injunction to prevent him

contacting or being near her, or even her right to leave the marital home) under the non-*shari'a* Act was not only unnecessary but also violates the *qawamunna* status or authority of the Muslim husband (Othman 1999a).

For academics or social scientists who study Islam and its diverse contemporary ideas and contexts, the kind of tension, differences and conflicting views that Muslim women activists face in their work are nothing new. In the past three decades, academic work has described how the quest for modernity among various kinds of Muslim groups throughout the world has never been simple and without challenges. Ultimately, it is up to Muslims, and women are no exception in this case, to take up the challenge of finding a workable path towards reviewing and rethinking the kind of Islam and modernity that should prevail in their own contexts. This is much easier said than done. Yet, the history of Islam itself has produced a plurality of interpretations and a diversity of schools of thought. The experience of Muslim women activists so far only confirms the view that one central question remains on the agenda for contemporary Muslims. To what extent are Muslims able to undertake self-criticism and doubt in an effort to seek a conceptual reorientation that provides us with a realistic basis for the change and renewal of Muslim women?

Islamization and the prospects of democratization

Developments in the Islamization process and its agenda have serious implications for the process of democracy and the maintenance of pluralism and social cohesion, and even the integrity of the state and its national community of citizens in Muslim countries such as Malaysia. Contentious debates have ensued between Muslim modernists and traditionalists concerning a viable and authentic Islamic alternative to the Western model of the state and its legal and political institutions. While the debate continues, governments faced with threats to their political dominance and Islamic credentials press on with their reactive and ill-considered Islamization agenda. Since 1988 the Malaysian government has established a dual legal system in the country: the existing British style laws and a separate and autonomous *shari'a* system. This particular kind of legal pluralism, established within a short period of time, has now brought out a number of conflicts in the working of the law in cases where the interests of Muslim and non-Muslim parties are involved. It is citizens as well as the standing of the state's legal culture that have been made to suffer from the ensuing incoherence and conflict (see Othman 1998c).

Where there seems to have been a lack of concern about the legal problems created by cases caught between the *shari'a* and its 'secular' counterparts, talk of 'Islamic democracy' remains a strong feature both in current Islamist as well as modernist writings and activism. Many of these discussions have now been overtaken, or at least decisively recast, by the political crises and events of 1998–9 in both Malaysia and Indonesia. The *Reformasi* movements in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur may not actually indicate how the dynamic responses to the conditions

created by the recent economic and political crises will evolve, take shape or be translated into sustained political action or effective reform. It remains an open question whether *Reformasi* will lead to a further development in the nature, intensity or shape of activism of the existing Islamic movements in the Southeast Asian region.

What remains crucial for the democratization project in both Malaysia and Indonesia is whether the state, its hegemony and the national political culture can be changed from within; primarily to reform the hierarchical authoritarianism that besets them. In the case of Malaysia, the state (and specifically UMNO, the dominant partner in the ruling coalition) has to 'democratize' itself and its Islamization agenda. Only by doing so can the current government provide a viable alternative to the kind of Islam that its opposition PAS has to offer Malaysian citizens.

Notes

1 *Syariah* is the Malay transliteration of the Arabic word *shari'a,* which literally means 'the way'. The term *shari'a* in contemporary Islam refers to laws and rules interpreted from certain verses of the Qur'an, the *hadith* (reported sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad) and the *sunnah* (the example set by the Prophet Muhammad in his lifetime). The kind of Islamic laws that many political Muslim movements intend to establish today tends to be derived from an anachronistic approach or interpretation. They seek to re-affirm and re-impose in the present early Islamic understandings of Qur'anic ethical imperatives, without a critical review of the historical and cultural contexts. In this essay, the Malay transliteration *(syariah)* is only used when referring to any specific Malaysian or Indonesian *shar'ia* enactments or documents. Otherwise, the Arabic term *shari'a* is used throughout the discussion.

2 The term 'Islamist' is used here to refer to groups or discourses of those contemporary Muslims committed to the introduction of an Islamic state or at the very least the further implementation of Muslim laws in the state as a way of reviving the Islamic character of public life in their country. 'Islamicist' is another term that has been used by others to refer to similarly oriented groups.

3 From the document 'Islam and Secularism Workshop: The Abant Final Proclamation' (dated 16 July 1998) released by the main organizer of the meeting *Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi* (Journalists and Writers Foundation) soon after the workshop in Abant. See also their website at: http://www.yazarlarvakfi.org.tr

4 See the *Muslim Democrat,* 1(1) May 1999 published by the Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), Washington, DC. See also their website at: http://www.islam-democracy.

5 *Fatwa* are the theological and legal reasoning offered by a *mufti* (an Islamic religious official who is also an *ulama* or Islamic scholar) to enlighten and educate the public about Islam and to assist them in arranging their affairs in accordance with the *shari'a*. *Fatwa* issued by *mufti* or an *ulama* are regarded as advisory opinions that are not binding and enforceable on the *ummah* (community). For centuries in the history of Islam, *fatwa* were developed within a question-and-answer framework

where the *mufti* responded to questions posed by individuals. If a person was dissatisfied with *the fatwa* of one *mufti,* s/he was free to consult another. A *fatwa* is merely a guide to the *ummah* to be abided by voluntarily. It is not an order for the government of a Muslim community to enforce by law. No Muslim country has ever given a *fatwa* the automatic force of law and made it a crime for a citizen to defy, disobey or dispute one. Such provisions in the Malaysian *shari'a* criminal laws in 1995 are unprecedented in the history of Islam. This violates a fundamental principle in Islam: that change must occur gradually through education and not through force and coercion.

6 *Darul Arqam* is an Islamizing movement that combines communitarian economic entrepreneurialism with the pursuit of what its adherents consider as a lifestyle of pristine Medinan simplicity based on the Prophet Muhammad's *sunnah.* The organization was banned by the Malaysian government in 1994.

7 *Ulama* are persons learned and knowledgeable in Islamic matters, rules and laws. In contemporary Muslim countries *ulama* are often appointed as religious officials and functionaries in the various Muslim administrative and legal bodies or institutions (as a *mufti* or a *qadi,* a judge in the *shari'a* court).

8 This view was expressed by an ABIM member, who was also a member of the academic staff at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM, National University of Malaysia), and echoed by most university undergraduates in Universiti Malaya, UKM and the International Islamic University (IIU) interviewed in the course of my research project on *'Kemodenan Budaya dan Islam'* (the Culture of Modernity and Islam) in 1996–7. Faith in the 'Islamic credentials' of the person is based on formal training in a recognized Islamic institution and not on a careful scrutiny of the ideas and views espoused on legal, political or social matters.

9 JAKIM became the central agency in the planning and management of Islamic Affairs in Malaysia. It is a federal government agency comprising several divisions all placed under the Prime Minister's Department.

10 This *hadith* is weak. *Hadith* have been categorized by Muslim scholars according to the reliability of their source of reporting and accordingly considered 'strong' or 'weak'. The *hadith* in question is also considered a general one, thus requiring specification *(takhsis).* There is no evidence to show that the Prophet Muhammad ever compelled anyone to become a Muslim or punish by death anyone for leaving the faith (see Kamali 1994; see also SIS letter, *The Star,* 24 July 1999).

11 The official name of the group under Malaysian law is SIS Forum Malaysia. By 1986, the word 'Islam' was not allowed to be used by any group or organization without the explicit consent of the government. 'Sisters in Islam' (SIS) is permitted only as an authorial name in the group's letters to newspapers and publications.

12 *Hudud* in its legal sense means a punishment prescribed by God in the revealed text of the Qur'an or the *sunnah,* the application of which is in the right *(haqq)* of God. Meaning literally 'limits', the *hudud* in their original legal sense and intent were instituted as a set of maximum and in effect mandatory punishments for various major categories of crimes (see also Ismail 1995:1–50). In December 1993, SIS submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of Malaysia urging the federal parliament not to endorse the Kelantan *hudud* law. Although passed by Kelantan's state legislature, the law could not be implemented unless the federal parliament endorsed it. Under the constitutional divisions of powers between the federal and state governments, a state law with criminal provisions can only take effect through

an amendment to the Malaysian constitution. The passing of such an amendment by the federal parliament would require the support of the *Barisan Nasional* that then held an overwhelming majority in parliament. The passing of the enactments by the Kelantan legislature and their impending referral to the federal legislature for approval produced a tense standoff in Malaysian politics; did Mahathir and his ruling coalition dare to approve or reject Kelantan's *hudud* legislation? Either way the political implications were profound. In a high-profile public campaign in 1993–4, SIS sought to provide a principled and intellectually coherent case against the endorsement of the Kelantan enactments. The case was grounded in modernist Islam, which, by invoking the 'historicity critique', rejected the crude equation of *hudud* with *shari'a* and *shari'a* with Islam—the basis of the Kelantan enactments as argued by the Islamists. Consistently arguing on religious, legal, political and human rights grounds against the endorsement of the Kelantan *hudud* law, the campaign waged by SIS demonstrates the need for a human rights activism grounded in Islamic terms.

13 Elsewhere I have shown how an excessive delegation of law-making has enabled the states' *mufti* to arbitrarily introduce *fatwa* on controversial issues and immediately turn them into law without any process of consultation or discussion with the state legislative body or the public (Othman 1998a). Such infringements of the democratic space for civil rights take place because the *mufti* have not displayed any concern or sensitivity towards the undemocratic basis of their actions.

14 *The fatwa* controversy that broke out during the months of July-September 1997 began with the arrest and immediate prosecution of three young Muslim women contestants in the Miss Malaysia Petite beauty pageant. The way the three women were arrested by officers of the *Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri Selangor* (JAIS, Department of Islamic Affairs and Administration of Selangor) was the cause of considerable protest. JAIS officials apparently bought tickets to the pageant, witnessed the whole proceedings, and then at the crowning ceremony suddenly went on stage to arrest the three Muslim participants (one of whom won the title), producing handcuffs in full view of the entire predominantly nonMuslim audience. Letters written to the editors of some newspapers and public comments in the print and electronic media by leading members of human rights and women's groups questioned the manner of the arrest. Many of them questioned the real motive of the JAIS functionaries in subjecting people to such public humiliation. Some of the more vocal women commentators expressed their criticism by pointing out that only a few days prior to the beauty pageant, a body-building contest had taken place in the same state (Selangor). That event involved many Malay (Muslim) males exhibiting their well-toned bodies in the briefest of underwear and therefore exposing much more of the male *aurat* (parts of the body that Muslims may permissibly expose in public). The body-building contest, however, was never interrupted, nor were any of the Muslim male participants arrested for a similar breach of the prevailing *shari'a* laws.

The intense debate in the national newspapers and electronic media that followed the incident highlighted the public outcry at the arbitrariness with which the law had been implemented. Only by this incident did Malaysians come to know that *fatwa* issued by the Mufti for the state of Selangor could be automatically enforced as law.

15 Ishak Baharum's appointment as the Selangor Mufti was not renewed in the year following *the fatwa* controversy of 1997. The government explained that he was past retirement age, and the time had come for the promotion of younger *ulama* to the post.

16 This election was a great test for Prime Minister Mahathir's long-standing rule following the sacking and detention of Anwar and the unprecedented demonstrations on Kuala Lumpur's streets.

17 This statement or remark was often quoted by religious officials and *ulama* in Malaysia (regardless of whether they were supporters of UMNO or PAS) when I interviewed them in 1993–4 regarding the proposed *hudud* legislation in Kelantan. A similar opinion was also expressed in later interviews regarding the *fatwa* controversy of 1997.

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6
The blessed tragedy
The making of women's activism during the *Reformasi* years

Melani Budianta

Introduction: where the women are

In her paper 'The 1999 Elections in Indonesia: where were the women?', Susan Blackburn (1999) regrets that Indonesian women's organizations were slow to support Megawati Sukarnoputri, chairperson of the populist political party *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (PDIP, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), when she was nominated as a presidential candidate. Blackburn argues that Megawati's candidacy was likely to be 'the main feminist issue' to emerge from the elections and considers it a 'feminist coup for a woman to hold this position [the presidency]' (Blackburn 1999: 5). The tendency to measure women's empowerment through the political ascendancy of well-known figures is not uncommon. Women leaders such as Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, Chandrika Bandaraneike Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail in Malaysia and Megawati in Indonesia have been viewed as signs of rising feminist power in the region (*Business Times* 1999).

Malaysian women activists, like their Indonesian counterparts, are hesitant to consider the rise of women leaders of political parties in their respective countries as an indication of feminist advances.[1] Rather than judge this reaction as a failure to seize opportunities or a misguided tendency to 'shun power' and remain outside the system, as Blackburn suggests, we might question whether the essentialist approach that links high profile women leaders with feminism ignores the complex and multiple discourses in which the women leaders are embedded. The controversy over Megawati's candidacy highlighted positions on the permissibility of a female president and was, as a result, a feminist issue. Nevertheless, for many activists, Megawati and Wan Azizah represent the patriarchal discourses of Sukarnoism and conservative Islam respectively.

Instead of highlighting prominent women in the battlefield of elite politics, we should turn to the less structured but more significant processes that occur among women in various social strata. Such processes materialized in the highly visible acceleration of women's activism during the *Reformasi* years in response to the extended economic crisis in Indonesia and Malaysia. Women's activism in this

regard is not a singular movement but consists of heterogeneous and wide-ranging efforts by women to organize themselves formally or informally.

In Indonesia, women's activism played a significant role in mounting civil disobedience. For example, women organized the first street rally during the heightened economic and political crises in the months preceding the end of Suharto's rule on 21 May 1998. Despite official sanctions, women worked collectively in support of the victims of the violence of May 1998, organizing the provision of basic foodstuffs to alleviate the impact of the economic crisis or mobilizing logistical and moral support for student demonstrators. In Malaysia, women activists demanded structural reforms through the Women's Agenda for Change (WAC)[2] campaign (see also Chapter 5) and introduced an independent women's candidate in the elections of 1999.[3] I believe that the eruption of wide-ranging activism in the region, rather than the competition within elites, provides more significant evidence of ongoing patterns and processes of women's empowerment.

The intersection of women's activism and the *Reformasi* movements in Malaysia and Indonesia needs closer scrutiny than can be provided here. The term's origins in the latter and subsequent relocation to the former are discussed in Chapter 1. Although it has different values and significations in the two countries, *'Reformasi'* gained currency in both to describe the intensified social and political protests of the late 1990s. The term is nevertheless difficult to use as a tool of analysis in itself. In this chapter, *Reformasi* is used to refer to the political, economic and social responses to a multidimensional crisis that provided an outlet for previously repressed and widespread demands for structural change. *Reformasi* does not serve as a framework for understanding women's activism, but as a context that arguably heightens the latter's urgency.

In Malaysia, *Reformasi* was sparked off by the arrest and beating of the ousted Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim. Malaysian women activists framed their protests on humanitarian grounds against the treatment of Anwar and the violent actions taken by the police in the ensuing demonstrations against the state. These activists nevertheless maintained a critical stance independent of any political party.[4] Similarly, Indonesian women activists supported the right of a woman to be elected president without necessarily endorsing Megawati's party. While they concurred with the general demand voiced by students for a 'new, clean and demilitarized government' (Bianpoen 2000), Indonesian women also rallied around other distinct issues such as humanitarian concerns. Their politics may have coalesced with the particular political demands of the moment, but was not subsumed by them.

Individuals and women's groups in Indonesia and Malaysia intensified their activism in the *Reformasi* years in response to the dire problems caused by the regional economic collapse of 1997–8 and state violence, especially when directed against women. For decades, a number of Malaysian NGOs rallied against the ISA (Internal Security Act) and other repressive laws while providing support for the victims of these punitive measures and their families.[5] Malaysian women

activists nevertheless acknowledge that the degree of state violence used during *Reformasi* prompted them to mobilize wider support and more aggressive campaigns than ever before.[6]

In these turbulent years, Indonesian women contended not only with the severe economic crisis that marked the end of an authoritarian regime, but significant events that brought women's bodies to the centre of national and public attention. Among the events that exposed the crudest commodification and subordination of women in the hegemonic formation of the New Order were the rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women and the disclosure of severe cases of violence against women in the areas of military conflict in Aceh, Irian Jaya and East Timor. Women activists seized those haunting moments in order to redefine and empower their position as well as to foster social solidarity within a wide-ranging and heterogeneous activism that contributed significantly to democratization.

The impact of the crises in Indonesia on the bodies of women raised the consciousness of many women who had been depoliticized before; they realized that 'what was once known, and treated as "the separate concerns of women", was in fact closely linked to the intricate game of politics,…a world from which women, were usually excluded' (Bianpoen 2000). The work of mobilizing support and rallying brought about the realization by women of their collective power and the significance of their voice in giving alternative perspectives or solutions to the conflict-ridden country.

The ways in which the process of politicization occurred in Indonesia and Malaysia were different because of the differences in their relationship to the state, the distinct ways the subjectivity of the actors as 'women' was constructed, and the specific political cultures in which they were embedded. It is helpful in this regard to compare, for instance, the attitude of women activists towards the system of political representation in their respective nation-states. The Women's Candidacy Initiative (WCI) campaigned in Malaysia for the election of a women's representative. It did so without the nomination of any political party but in alignment or with the endorsement of established parties. WCI's move indicated faith in the existing bodies of political representation. In contrast, Indonesian women activists were wary of a similar effort in their own country because of their scepticism about the system of political representation. Instead of prioritizing electoral politics, Indonesian women led solidarity movements across religious, ethnic and class boundaries that motivated women's interfaith prayers and activities imbued by the spirit of *ahimsa* (non-violence). Differences in the structure of religious, ethnic, gender and class identities in each country made such solidarity movements far more visible in Indonesia than in Malaysia.[7] Chapters 3 and 5 offer further insights into the particular dynamics and challenges of such identities to solidarity activism in Malaysia.

This chapter will concentrate on women's activism in Indonesia while taking note of the Malaysian situation where relevant. It is important to raise the issue of positionality at the outset, not because I think the question of objectivity cannot be overcome 'scientifically', but because I am engaged with the subject matter

not as a distant observer but as a participant. As a university lecturer living in Jakarta, I will not be doing justice to the topic by making the claim that my version of the story encompasses the experiences of all Indonesian women activists. As a volunteer in some of the groups and participant in most of the events discussed, I occupy no neutral zone. The rendering of the narrative as well as the analysis will be at best partial and subjective. Given that women's activism was evolving at the time of study, this chapter does not promise conclusive findings but focuses instead on the processes considered to be significant to democratization.

I will look closely at the activities of *Suara Ibu Peduli* (SIP, Voice of Concerned Mothers), *Tim Relawan Divisi Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan* (TRKP, Violence Against Women Division of the Volunteers for Humanity), *Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan dan Demokrasi* (KPIKD, Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy), *Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan* (Komnas Perempuan, The National Commission on Violence Against Women) and the informal collectives that organized various peace rallies.[8] These groups represent the different forms of activism or at least entry points of the many chosen by Indonesian women. This is not to give the impression that they are distinct and separate from one another. Women's groups in Jakarta were founded, grew and evolved into other organizations in an organic process. As they attracted new members and headed in previously unanticipated directions, some women left to form their own organizations.[9] A pool of intellectuals and activists in Jakarta served as the founders, initiators and staff of many groups.

Women's groups played an important role not only in the larger social movement but also in shaping women's social and political consciousness. Although they were by no means the only consequential groups, their activism had an impact at the national level because of their strategic location in Jakarta. Like other institutions consolidated under the New Order, the media, whose crucial importance to representation and the expression of voice is discussed in Chapter 2, is centralized in the capital. Unsurprisingly, it was towards the offices of the state bureaucracy, the President, the People's Consultative Assembly and the House of Representatives in Jakarta that the wheels of *Reformasi* turned.

New democratic struggles and solidarity

Theories of social movements that focus on social-psychological strategies of resource mobilization (Morris and McClurg Mueller, 1992) are mostly structuralist in their orientation, suggesting 'an ordered coordinated system' and stable categories that are limited in their usefulness in explaining the highly unstable and unstructured processes of women's activism studied here. Moreover, the plurality of positions and voices suggests that the very category of 'women' is not a fixed category, but 'a site of permanent openness and resignifiability' (Butler and Scott 1992:6).

It is more helpful to look at the various tactics and symbols of collective identity used by the Jakarta women's groups which proved to be strategic and

simultaneously allowed for a temporary and shifting discursive 'positioning' (Hall 1991). 'Discursive', using Ernesto Laclau's definition, does not refer 'to the "text"narrowly defined, but to the ensemble of the phenomena in and through which social production of meaning takes place' (quoted in Nelson and Grossberg 1988:49). In what Hall calls the 'politics of positioning', he observes that 'one group…take[s] on the agenda of the other' or 'transform[s] itself in the course of coming into alliance, or some kind of formation with another'. As a result, 'it has to learn something of the otherness which created the other constituency' (Hall 1991:68). Throughout this chapter, the concept of strategic positioning and the feminist notion of gender as a discursive construction will be used to examine how women utilize or rewrite the existing discourses at the particular intersection in which they challenge the existing structure.

In this chapter, theorizing is not seen as the production of 'intellectual constructs bent on representing the truth of the world' but as 'a social activity—as contingent and located social practice' (McClure in Butler and Scott 1992:365). In this regard, I borrow as my theoretical framework Chantal Mouffe's much quoted notion of new social movements as 'new democratic struggles':

> Democratic discourse questions all forms of inequality and subordination. This is why I propose to call those new social movements 'new democratic struggles' because they are extensions of the democratic revolution to new forms of subordination. Democracy is our most subversive idea because it interrupts all existing discourses and practices of subordination.
>
> (Mouffe 1988:100)

This democratic right of subjects is not limited to a citizen's rights in the management of public affairs—one that Mouffe termed a liberal parliamentary conception of democracy—but the existence of 'other rights and their political characters' that include the rights of women and various minorities to equality and to self-determination. According to Mouffe, the 'concept of democratic struggle, thus institutionalizes "a pluralism of subjects'"(Mouffe 1988:100).

Besides the inclusion of the concept of 'plurality', what is most relevant in Mouffe's theory to the nature of women's activism is the significance of 'solidarity' as the basic characteristic of a democratic struggle:

> A new conception of democracy also requires that we transcend certain individualistic conceptions of rights and that we elaborate a central notion of solidarity. This can only be achieved if the rights of certain subjects are not defended to the detriment of the rights of other subjects.
>
> (Mouffe 1988:100)

As a result, the degree to which the democratization process succeeds is measured by 'the chain of equivalences set up between the defence of the rights of one group and those of other groups' (Mouffe 1988:100).

Mouffe (1988) explains the eruption of democratic struggles as expressions of resistance against the hegemonic formation of 'the State and Capital' that is characterized by the commodification of social life and the subordination it has created; growing state intervention in all aspects of life that lead to bureaucratization and new forms of subordination; and the increasing uniformity of social life. I refer to Mouffe's concept of democratic struggle because, first of all, it does not emphasize structural forms of change but instead considers seriously democratization processes. It underlines not the outcome but the making. Second, I find that one characteristic of this democratic process, namely solidarity, visibly characterizes most women's activism in Indonesia at the turn of the century.

The distinct hegemonic formation of the state and capital in Southeast Asian countries needs more specific elaboration than this chapter can provide. It suffices to say that in Indonesia especially, the flow of capital that increased during the New Order era was mediated through a growing authoritarian and militaristic system that diverted the flow for its own interests. For thirty years, this authoritarian system managed to truncate civil society by centralizing power in the state apparatus—an intervention that has undermined democratic foundations: the legal system, political representation, and so forth (Hikam 1998). The commodification of women during the triumph of the New Order hegemonic formation was manifested in the discourse of developmentalism and militarism through the use of women's bodies and sexuality to conquer (Wieringa 1999; Sunindyo 1999). State intervention in regulating women's affairs and in constructing the subjectivity of women is manifest in the New Order's highly patriarchal discourse of womanhood and its supporting institutions (Sears 1996; Robinson 1997; Sunindyo 1999). The growing uniformity of the New Order's hegemonic culture emerged from state control of critical differences which could potentially disrupt its power.

The hegemonic formation at the historical juncture under study is different from earlier women's movements as outlined by Wieringa (1999). The Indonesian title of her book *Penghancuran Gerakan Perempuan di Indonesia* (The Destruction of the Women's Movement in Indonesia) speaks to her main thesis: the rise of feminist consciousness amongst Indonesian women, traced from the colonial period up to the early years of the New Order, is a story of a feminist promise crushed by subsequent hegemonic formations. Among the milestones of feminist activism were the works and letters of the Javanese aristocrat Kartini. Her letters in Dutch on her cultural imprisonment inspired many generations of women. Other milestones include the first Women's Congress of 1928, the formation (and the constant restructuring and renaming) of federations of women's organizations that followed the Congress, and in particular, the role of the socialist-leftist organization Gerwani (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia,* Indonesian Women's Movement) that was affiliated with the banned Indonesian Communist Party. The feminist concerns that motivated this history of activism were, among others, the issue of women's education, polygamy and the political rights of women.

However, these were subsumed or subordinated by the larger male-dominated framework of cultural tradition, revolution, nationalism, or party politics.

Wieringa singled out Gerwani as the most political and mass-based organization. While generally its activism was driven by educated women of the upper and middle classes, Gerwani had few cadres from the working class and poor. The 1965 anti-communist bloodshed that marked the beginning of the New Order regime not only crushed Gerwani activism but also cast its activists as sexualized 'monsters' who mutilated army generals in a sexual orgy. Wieringa argues that behind this demonization of Gerwani lay the New Order's fear of politically conscious and radical women as well as an effort to discipline women into the idealized subject: obedient, self-sacrificing and subordinate. The anti-communist ideology of the New Order also manifested itself in the repression of any populist and mass-based activism, including the socially engaged arts and literature.

It is against this historical backdrop that women activists of the *Reformasi* period speak of 'breaking the silence'[10] or 'keeping women's activism from being subordinated and subsumed by the *Reformasi'*.[11] Compared to earlier activism, the women's groups studied here are more heterogeneous and inclusive in the participation of their actors, involving women from the upper classes and the urban working class and poor as well as the older and younger generations. Since this activism is also characterized by a strong emphasis on solidarity beyond gender, I prefer to use Mouffe's paradigm to read the activism as democratic movements rather than purely feminist ones; I place these movements, to use Mouffe's term, in a'feminist democratic' perspective (Mouffe in Butler and Scott 1992:382).

West and Blumberg (1990) define four different issues 'that have drawn women into the protest arena historically and throughout the world'—economic survival, national or ethnic issues, humanistic or nurturing issues, and women's rights issues —as a comparative typological map. Using this definition, this chapter will discuss four different kinds of activism, focusing on one or more women's groups in each instance. Each section will examine the ways in which the activism brings changes to the actors' lives, the specific discursive strategies used and the intricate processes of negotiation with the dominant forces as well as the ways the activism fosters solidarity. The chapter will conclude by assessing the legacy of structural and internal constraints faced by women's activism and the possibilities of change that they offer.

Breaking the silence: discursive positionings

Responding to the economic crisis

According to West and Blumberg (1990), 'women's collective action at the grass-roots level, and on economic "bread and butter"issues' throughout the world has been widely documented, given 'their traditional roles…to feed, shelter and clothe

their families within patriarchal, racist and classist constraints' (West and Blumberg 1990:15). Charity activities organized by middle class women during economic crises are common. What is unique in the activism of the Voice of Concerned Mothers (SIP) is that it did not stem merely from 'survival' or 'charity' impulses, but from a conscious discursive strategy of urban middle class women that resulted unexpectedly in the cross-alliance and empowerment of women from all social backgrounds.

The worsening of the economic crisis, marked by the plunge of the Rupiah to one-fifth of its exchange value to the US Dollar between May 1997 and February 1998, forced Indonesian families, especially those who had lost their incomes due to lay-offs, to adjust their expenditures as well as their daily menu. Since the responsibility of overseeing daily shopping and the preparation of meals in Indonesia falls generally on the shoulders of women, they are keen on observing the changes in the economy as they have to find ways to cope with its impact on their daily lives. The period of the economic crisis was also politically educational for men and women in general, as they saw how their daily lives were connected not only to the state of the national economy but also to the increasingly intolerable ways in which the government managed its affairs.

For many educated middle class women in Jakarta, the economic crisis brought about the realization that society at large was structured in ways that put people—especially women and children—in an unfavourable position. The lay-off of male breadwinners was followed by an increase in domestic violence towards women (Kalyanamitra 1998). There was a sharp increase in prostitution and street children. One source of family nutrition that many found unaffordable during the crisis was powdered milk, whose price escalated at the same rate as the exchange value of the US Dollar. This was a grave problem, since the percentage of women with babies and children as well as those who were pregnant or lactating was especially high in Indonesia.

As the economic crisis worsened in mid-February 1998, dozens of women activists, intellectuals and members of various women's organizations gathered in the office of the feminist magazine *Jurnal Perempuan* (Woman's Journal) eager to pressure the government to alleviate the impact of the crisis, especially on women and children. The women held several meetings and found that it was very difficult to agree on a form for their activism that would be both strategic and safe. The political atmosphere was tense, and the security apparatus was on the alert. Strong critical voices were not tolerated, let alone street protests. When the idea of a street rally was introduced, many women who were not ready for 'direct action' protests backed off because they considered it too radical, too 'political' and too risky. On the other hand, when the idea of foregrounding motherhood and selling cheap powdered milk was discussed, many saw it as subscribing to the dominant gender ideology that enshrined feminine domesticity. Other women activists felt alienated by the strongly middle class and 'bourgeois' colour of the project. By the third meeting, the participants had trickled from more than sixty to less than a dozen.[12]

In the end, 'Voice of Concerned Mothers' (SIP) was chosen as the name for the planned street rally to alert the government as well as the larger public, especially the middle classes, about the impact of the economic crisis on children and women. To provide a real contribution and temporary solution to the problem, the women that supported the project collected US$1,000 to buy powdered milk for babies, children and pregnant women and to sell in affordable packages to the poor families suffering most from the crisis.

In the rally of 23 February 1998, dozens of middle class educated women walked around the Welcome Monument opposite Hotel Indonesia, a location in the heart of Jakarta's main commercial and administrative centre, singing '*Kulihat Ibu Pertiwi*' (I Saw Our Motherland) (see Appendix I). They prayed and held posters that stated 'The Love of Concerned Mothers' or demanded 'Healthy families, with basic needs fulfilled' and 'Children should get good nutrition'. In 15 minutes, dozens of police and intelligence officers dispersed the march and took three leaders of the march by force to the city's police headquarters where they underwent twenty-three hours of interrogation.[13]

The SIP rally as well as the arrest and trials of the three women attracted national and international media attention and soon became the centre of public discussion.[14] The rally was the first public defiance of the official declaration of Jakarta as being in 'alert 1' status, and a new ban on street protests. These official measures were a response to a growing number of mass protests that later came to be known as the *Reformasi* movement. The SIP trials became the meeting point for Jakarta's middle class intellectuals and activists, who packed the halls. Women in Catholic habits and the Muslim *jilbab* (headscarf) distributed flowers and led supporters in singing 'I Saw Our Motherland' (*Pusat Riset Informasi Media Indonesia,* 5 March 1998). This was one of the earliest uses of the discursive strategies that would be used by women in future peace rallies. Women of different religious backgrounds showed their difference by using their religiously marked clothing as signifiers of plurality, at a time when the country was already torn by widespread inter-religious conflicts. An image of them walking hand in hand was continuously flashed by the media as they reported the events.[15] The unifying space of 'women' and 'concerned mothers' (more in the spiritual sense) and the shared hope for peace (symbolized by the flowers) and patriotism (the Motherland song) were deployed to cross social boundaries of difference.

Two months after the SIP trials, the need for logistical support in the critical days before the fall of Suharto provided an occasion for women as a social group to work with other mixed groups, most importantly with students. Around 11,000 rice packets, drinks and other basic necessities were needed for the thousands of students who occupied the premises of the People's Consultative Assembly, as well as for the victims of the riots on 13–14 May 1998 and their relatives in hospitals. To meet this demand, SIP worked with other women's groups to provide logistical support. The offices of women's organizations were instantly turned into centres where people from all over Jakarta, from Chief Executive Officers of corporations to street peddlers, contributed money and food.

The mobilization of support for the student movement around the simple offering of 'rice packets' is significant for civil as well as women's empowerment. Although such a communal effort is not rare in daily life (e.g. family feasts, as well as religious and public events), the scale of the mobilization exceeded exclusively communal boundaries and bound people from diverse backgrounds (men, women, the urban poor and the conglomerates) into a common effort carried out voluntarily with an eagerness, enthusiasm and sense of urgency that had not been seen in three decades. Although several women activists considered this type of mobilization as falling back into the 'feminine' domain of domesticity, it actually offered an opportunity for women in particular and the wider public to see that 'domestic work' such as cooking and preparing food has a significant political value and can become an important political weapon.

SIP's activism also served as the turning point for educated middle class women and other women confined to the boundaries of the professional and domestic worlds, as they learaed about the world of social and political activism. The expansion of Karlina Leksono-Supeli's career from an apolitical scientist to a committed activist is a good example. Known as a brilliant young scientist, the researcher in the State Research and Technology Centre was close to its Director, B.J.Habibie, the Indonesian Vice-President to whom Suharto would hand over the Presidency. Before volunteering to be the leader of the SIP rally, Karlina had no prior experience as an activist and her knowledge of feminism was limited to reading *Jurnal Perempuan,* which she helped to edit. By the end of the trials, she had become a prominent public figure standing for humanitarian and women's causes and was later actively involved in helping the victims of the May riots and other armed conflicts in Indonesia.

This personal transformation was not easy and without costs. For those educated middle class women gathering in the streets for the first time, it was a personal battle against the values of respectability and individual safety valued by their families. On the morning of the rally, Karlina was locked in by her daughter out of fear for her mother's life. Gadis Arivia, the director of *Jurnal Perempuan,* who was later detained with Karlina, used her mobile phone to reassure her expatriate husband that she was not 'going to the street' even as she was walking to the site of the rally. Relatives of these women gathered in hotel coffee shops watching from afar and feeling tense and anxious. The stressful and demanding life of an activist responding to the day-to-day crises during the *Reformasi* period changed the daily routine of these middle class women and placed new strains on individuals and families.[16]

The organizational development of SIP further changed the lives of many women. The temporary distribution of cheap milk—a tactic called 'milk politics'—intended in the beginning as a short term project by the middle class activists to launch a social protest, later took a different direction. They were forced to commit themselves and learn how to lead a community-based organization. SIP's media exposure attracted lower middle class housewives to the milk programme, including those living in the slums of Kemanggisan Hilir and the poor

and largely Muslim areas of Tanjung Priok. Like many of the SIP mothers, Maria, the leader of an East Jakarta SIP branch and an expectant mother with three small children, confessed that she came to the SIP office because of her own need for cheap milk. She took the initiative to establish the SIP centre in her house because she felt she should share her good fortune with her neighbours (*Jurnal Perempuan* 1999:155). By August 1998, SIP had 4,000 women who did not become just buyers of cheap milk, but also active supporters and organizers of community activities in each of the seven SIP branches.

Lower middle class women initially had no interest in gender or women's issues beyond the need to meet basic needs. However, their encounter with women activists and intellectuals, and participation in the organizational meetings, workshops and seminars that SIP held for the members of the cooperative, introduced them to gender and feminist issues. Initially, these women introduced themselves using their husbands' names. Within one year they corrected others who called them by their husbands' names and proudly used their own. Before joining SIP, the women had inquired politely and seriously in order to ascertain that it was not a political organization. In the months that followed, the same women volunteered to join protest rallies and demonstrations in spite of the discouragement and threats from their communities and the state.

By distributing cheap milk in their communities, SIP members also learned how to organize and be assertive. To commemorate their anniversary in April 1999, around twenty organizers of SIP branches in Jakarta held an internal workshop in which organizers of each branch presented a paper mapping the social and economic conditions of their members, listing the various social and economic problems observed as well as proposed solutions. The proposals included aerobics activities to distract youngsters from gang fights, tuition subsidies for children of poor families, and the provision of cheap commodities. A number of SIP branch leaders claimed that their existence as an important social group was now acknowledged by their communities. Previously, women were never invited to community meetings that typically involved only the husband as the head of the family. Their contribution to community activities was usually limited to serving food. With the appearance of SIP, local officials and community leaders often came to the women to discuss community matters.

As SIP became recognized, it inspired women in Jakarta as well as other places to conduct similar activities, many using the words *'Ibu'* (Mother) and *'Peduli'* (Concerned). During a seminar held by SIP in October 1998 to discuss state violence against women in various parts of the country, a delegation of women and children from Aceh came uninvited to urge SIP to take up their cause against military abuses in their region. SIP Jakarta could not immediately respond to the needs of women in Aceh and other conflictridden areas beyond presenting their case to the public and collecting funds. Networking with women outside Jakarta was limited due to the problems of coordination, funding and human resources. Only ten months later did SIP Jakarta send a team to Aceh. In March 1999, SIP joined *Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan* (TRK, Volunteers of Humanity) on a

trip to another area that had suffered from violent ethnic conflicts, West Kalimantan. The two SIP women, the wife of a laid-off clerk who had never been involved in activism or travelled outside Java, and her neighbour from the lower middle class suburbs, established links with several women in Pontianak. The meeting resulted in the formation of a working group, consisting of women from different ethnic backgrounds, including the two ethnic groups in conflict.[17]

What is most significant in SIP's activism as a whole is the introduction of a discursive strategy using motherhood as a space for empowerment and finding a voice. This strategy is comparable to the radical use of motherhood to oppose the military regime in Chile in the 1970s (Chuchryk 1989). Women in *Mujeres Democraticas* (Democratic Women) and the Association of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared, like the mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Mexico City and the women in AWAM and SUARAM in Malaysia, were at the forefront of public denunciations of state or militaristic atrocities. In the above cases, the ideology of motherhood served 'as the single most important factor' that mobilized women. Ironically, 'it was precisely women's political invisibility and the exclusion of mothers and motherhood from the political sphere which not only enabled them to act but at the same time, legitimated their demands because they were wives and mothers' (Chuchryk 1989:141). In Chile, as in the case of SIP, 'the feature which most distinguishes the mothers' groups from other forms of women's political activity based on traditional conceptions of motherhood is the process of individual empowerment, one of the more dramatic consequences of participation in these groups' (Chuchryk 1989:24).

Wieringa (1999) notes that the use of motherhood in the women's movement prior to 1965 often indicated an ambivalent tug between essentialist and constructivist notions of women. SIP's choices, however, reflected a more critical awareness of the political marginalization of women through the dominant construction of mothers and motherhood. In the actual planning and discussion of the rally, the middle class women often mentioned the mothers of Plaza de Mayo as being an inspiration. In this case, the use of motherhood was not only a strategic compromise that fed into the New Order's paternalistic gender ideology, which has been rendered as 'State Ibuism' (Suryakusuma 1996:101–2). It was also a means to challenge the hegemonic power of the state and its policies using the very language sanctioned by the state. State Ibuism, to quote Suryakusuma, 'defines women as appendages and companions to their husbands, as pro-creators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of Indonesian society—in that order' (Suryakusuma 1996:101). The New Order's paternalistic ideology also rested on stereotypical binary oppositions of women and men (domestic/public, passive/active, emotional/rational, object/subject and feminine/masculine) while placing '*bapak* (father/man) as the primary source of power' (Suryakusuma 1996: 102). This ideology was long sustained by various state and national institutions, including the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the *Darma Wanita* (Women's Duty, an auxiliary organization of civil servants'

wives), *Kongres Wanita Indonesia* (Kowani, Indonesian Women's Congress) and *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (PKK, Family Welfare Guidance).

The words 'mothers' and 'motherhood' in the rhetoric of SIP highlights not the subordinate position of women but their moral force as educators, as concerned mothers of the nation and so forth.[18] At the same time it depicts women in intimate and respectable terms (as people's mothers), alluding to the stereotypical connotation of mothers as gentle, nurturing, and non-threatening. This feminine approach is especially pertinent *vis-à-vis* the strongly physical and repressive measures adopted by the New Order and its military instruments to curb social and political protests. Furthermore, by the binary logic of paternalism, the power for leadership and management of the country falls within the male domain, while the maternal voice is the conscience.

It is in this context that 'I Saw Our Motherland' was repeatedly sung at women's rallies and other protests over the years. One of a number of national songs that school children memorize, it is often sung in formal rituals commemorating independence and other national days. Coming from the independence struggle, it 'is a song of summoning that was intended to rally youth to the task of freeing and rescuing the motherland from her deepest suffering, suffering caused by the colonial power that had taken her dignity and dispossessed her of her wealth' (Sunindyo 1998:4). In the late 1990s, the song was used to raise awareness of the government's abuses of power not only against the motherland but also against women (and mothers, or women with 'motherly' concerns) in the country. While the song, as Sunindyo sees it, constructed the image of the motherland—and the stereotypical image of women—as 'a fragile feminine being who needs to be rescued, protected and guarded' (Sunindyo 1998:4). Nevertheless, the act of singing the song during the SIP trials, in defiance of the Judge's stern warnings against 'unruly behaviour' and when marching on the street at the risk of police detention, turned it into an empowering expression of women's defiance.

It is worth noting how Catholic nuns and young unmarried women marched together under the banner of mothers and motherhood in SIP rallies and other women's peace rallies. In these instances, and in the Motherland song, the maternal references are understood metaphorically rather than literally. Moreover, the word *ibu* in Indonesia is also used as a term of respect for women in general (Suryakusuma 1996:101).

The discursive strategy of motherhood was not only adopted in the face of state paternalism and militarism, but also to make the activism more acceptable to a wider spectrum of women. The allusion to 'mothers' and gentle 'motherhood' was necessary to tone down the radical and transgressive nature of the street demonstration. In the New Order's construction of gender, going to the street was considered beyond the sphere of respectable women. This New Order ideological legacy demonized women political activists (Tiwon 1996; Wieringa 1998).[19]

The case of SIP shows how planned as well as unplanned responses to the economic crisis transformed the lives of women of all classes and led to processes of redefining women's social and political positions. It also suggests how, in this

process of redefinition, women's activism served as a meeting ground not only for women of different backgrounds, but also for women as social groups (such as students).

Bridging boundaries: the peace rallies and the women's prayer

West and Blumberg (1990) see 'mounting evidence' of women acting as a catalytic element in national or ethnic struggles throughout the world as characteristic of a second type of women's activism. It is against this second type that I would contrast the loose and fluctuating informal women's groups that campaigned for peace in Jakarta and all over Indonesia. Instead of aligning themselves with any of the conflicting parties, these efforts were directed towards bridging ethnic and religious boundaries by drawing individuals and activists from different social groupings and by linking with the concerns of those involved in conflicts.

Wieringa (1999) has documented the role of Indonesian women in national issues such as revolution, nationalism and anti-imperialism. The turn of the millennium. however. offers a different set of conditions as Indonesia faces not an external enemy but the threat of internal disintegration. Violent ethnic, religious and regional conflicts of a scale unprecedented in national history have occurred in Aceh (North Sumatra), various places in Java, Kalimantan, Maluku, Irian and East Timor. As women realized that they were among the most vulnerable victims of the violence, they mobilized and refused to accommodate the dominant discourse of partisanship, and stressed instead the ecumenical messages of peace and tolerance.

The *Seruan Perempuan Indonesia* (SERUNI, Voice of Indonesian Women) interfaith prayer, to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 1998 in Jakarta, marked the beginning of a women's non-violent movement to promote peace and tolerance in response to the political and social divisions and conflicts that escalated in 1998–9. SERUNI, like many other names given to similar activities held that year, was an instantly created (and disposable) label to symbolize specific missions and messages, one of which was the solidarity of 'women of all classes, beliefs and professions'.

Organized by more or less the same pool of activists that supported SIP, *ahimsa* activities were initiated in Jakarta and always invoked regional and cultural diversity, as well as unity and solidarity. One method used, exemplified by the SERUNI press conference, was to present women leaders from different backgrounds from all over Indonesia. Another was to organize similar activities simultaneously in various cities all over Indonesia. A third was to link the activities to international events commemorating women (such as International Day for Ending Violence Against Women and International Women's Day).[20]

As campaigns for peace and solidarity, these activities made careful use of symbols and arts happenings. In the SERUNI interfaith prayer, as in the case of the SIP trials, women in the *Muslim jilbab* and nuns in their habits would sit next to each other. Candles placed in paper cups with different words written on them

—love, peace, justice, freedom and truth—were lit in darkness and waved gently in the air. In a peace rally in October 1998 that mourned victims of violence, the colours white and purple—and bouquets of flowers of the same colours—bearing the names of conflict-ridden places, were carried by marching women in fifteen cities, including Dili in East Timor and Banda Aceh in Aceh. These Indonesia-wide peace activities in 1998 drew around 500 people in Jakarta and similar numbers in other cities. In 1999 the rallies were organized from region to region with the message 'we, women from all over Indonesia also care for you'.

The peace rallies were significant in several ways. First, they offered an alternative discourse to the New Order's divisive policies and practices. The interfaith prayer was the most important, especially given the existence since the late 1980s of government policies that worked against religious tolerance. Although policies such as these were not necessarily supported by the Malaysian government, as indicated in Chapter 5, the end result of state-driven Islamization in the same period was divisive as Muslims and non-Muslims were increasingly subjected to different sets of laws. An example of government intervention in Islamic matters in Indonesia on the other hand is the religious decree by the government affiliated *Majlis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI, Council of Indonesian Ulama), proclaiming that Muslims should not greet or convey their good wishes on holidays celebrated by people of other faiths. This decree created an awkward social barrier in a society where neighbours typically visited each other on their respective religious holidays.

The 'Women's Interfaith Prayer' went quite far in challenging the intolerance encouraged by the state. Written by the Islamic feminist Lies Marcoes, the prayer begins with a quote from the Qur'an and gives thanks to God for his work through the exemplary lives of great women from different religions (see Appendix II). The prayer is inclusive of women of different religious and class backgrounds as well as gender ideologies. The litany of blessed women includes Mother Mary and Mother Teresa, Yasodara (the wife of the Buddha), and even a secular lower class heroine, the Indonesian factory worker Marsinah who was sexually violated and murdered when she spoke up on behalf of her peers (Marcoes 1999; see also Chapter 7). The prayer depicts women who rebel against their own husbands (Asiah, the wife of a pharaoh) as well as a self-sacrificing wife (Yasodara), queens as well as maidservants, economically enterprising women (Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad) as well as intelligent women (Aisyah, the daughter of the Prophet) and women leaders (Balqis, the Queen of Sheba). The prayer also brings into critical view all abuses of power, including the abuses of religion for political purposes. The critique was timely as religion and ethnicity had been highly politicized by the dominant discourse in the troubled years of the late 1990s, and cast as inviolable markers of difference as well as the source of the internal conflicts in many regions.

The Women's Interfaith Prayer became popular and was read in later interfaith activities, including those held by the new organization Masyarakat Dialog Antar Agama (MADIA, Society for Interfaith Dialogues). These interfaith activities

transgressed New Order policies by inviting people from religions and beliefs not acknowledged by the regime to lead prayers in public. Among the unrecognized religions included in these activities were Confucianism, Sundanese Islam and Orthodox Christianity of Syrian origins.[21]

In the organization of peace events, a great deal of effort was required in order to reach across class, ethnic, religious, regional and even professional boundaries, resulting in the formation of new networks and alliances among people of different backgrounds. The role of women was key to this solidarity activity. The peace rally of 25 November 1998, for example, resulted from the seminar on state violence held by SIP that was discussed earlier. Women activists from Irian Jaya, East Timor, Aceh and Jakarta who participated in the latter expressed concern about regional isolation and the desirability of a common plan of action. In an informal meeting after the seminar, they agreed to hold a peace rally simultaneously throughout Indonesia. Given the tendency of the Jakarta-based national media to ignore important events in the regions, the women activists believed that the proposed event could make a difference. The planning of the event started with compiling addresses as well as telephone and fax numbers in order to establish a chain of affiliated NGOs and community-based organizations. Given its origins in the SIP seminar, this solidarity activism was closely connected to motherhood activism, though expanding the latter to encompass solidarity across religious, ethnic, and regional divides.

Through the regional networking, activists also learned about cultural differences and commonalities. It was eye-opening for the organizers to learn, for instance, about the challenges of political symbolism. A candle in Aceh could be misconstrued as a Christian religious symbol while posing no problems in East Timor. The spirit of democratic pluralism was reflected in the informality in the organization of the all-Indonesia event. Anyone could organize the action in their own region as long as the principle of inclusive pluralism was respected.

The organizers of the solidarity event were faced with the uneven distribution of communications technology in the regions outside Java (especially in eastern Indonesia where telephone, fax and email communications were not easily available). The coordination of cross regional events depended very much on individual efforts. Another series of simultaneous rallies from March to May 1999 was less successful due to the structural and communications barriers faced by women activists.

Some of the peace activities were successful and others were less so in drawing the support of the public and media across the nation. Women's rallies were usually reported in the national newspapers accompanied by an attractive image of the event. Nevertheless, they rarely received serious coverage or analysis. The simultaneous rally of 15 cities on 25 November 1998 received better coverage, as the national newspapers paid special attention to how the events were organized in the various regions. It was also covered in the local newspapers. Instrumental to the success of many of the women's solidarity events was a women's email group launched in July 1998 that served as a mechanism 'to quickly disseminate

information and circulate feedback to create parity of awareness between the women in Jakarta and [their] peers elsewhere in the vast archipelago' (*NetAction* 1999). The list that cut across professional and interest groups enabled women from different backgrounds not only to connect with one another but also to join a wide spectrum of activities. Advertised and organized through this egroup, for instance, was a programme for women's events all over Indonesia called *Kaulan Perempuan* (Women's Events). This programme included arts exhibitions and performances, all strongly informed by a heightened awareness of women's political and social issues. The e-group also helped women to mobilize support for peace efforts in other regions.

Resisting racism and sexual violence

The issue of violence against women was one of the key humanitarian issues that increasingly became the focus of women's activism in Indonesia as well as Malaysia.[22] The May 1998 riots and the disclosure of the rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women, mostly in Jakarta, in the middle of the same month, became a climactic moment that forcefully brought violence against women to the attention of the national and international public arenas. The scale of the rapes (up to 156 cases),[23] the systematic nature of the crime, and the emotionally charged public uproar that followed not only shocked many women from their relative complacency into lives of activism, but also engaged them in precarious and complicated discursive battles over the many forces that had a stake in women's bodies.

A number of groups sprang to activism in response to the May riots of 1998.[24] Among the most visible was *Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan* (TRK, Volunteers of Humanity) an assembly of dozens of NGOs, mass organizations and individuals that united in the aftermath of the violent take-over of the headquarters of Megawati's political party on 27 July 1997.[25] As it assisted hundreds of victims of rioting and arson, TRK found that the violence included a series of rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women of such a magnitude that it necessitated the formation of a special division called *Tim Relawan Divisi Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan* (TRKP, Violence Against Women Division of the Volunteers for Humanity). Using as its headquarters the office of *Kalyanamitra,* TRKP organized volunteers to work at a hotline established to investigate the rapes and create support systems for the victims and their families. In its first public conference in June 1998, TRKP gathered around 200 participants from mixed backgrounds. Shocked and outraged by the crimes, most of them immediately registered to be TRKP volunteers.

The experience of TRKP illustrates how women activists tread the complicated intersection between questions of 'race' and sexuality. The racialization of the May 1998 rapes complicated the position of many Indonesian women activists. The victimization of Chinese-Indonesian women elicited a widespread international reaction, especially from overseas Chinese communities, thus sharpening the racial axis. While providing international pressure on the

government to seriously investigate the case, the racialization was counter-productive in many ways. As Heryanto (1999a) notes, the racialization fuelled and strengthened ethnic prejudices that had their own historical trajectories. It replicated the very violence that such incidents as the rapes produced (Heryanto 1999a: 315), thereby distracting attention from the 'serious gender dimensions of the incident' (Heryanto 1999a: 330). The racialization also hampered the united efforts of women activists to campaign for women's solidarity and to mobilize resistance against both the abuse of women's bodies as well as the racialization of that abuse. Heryanto (1999a) analyzes how the controversy over the rapes in the public discourse became a battleground for different meanings of 'truth' and 'justice'. When the rapes were disclosed by TRK, there was an outcry as well as a denial that was then followed by demands for evidence, without which any legal effort within the existing system would be futile. The debate over the rapes revealed not only the problems of defining truth but also the gender bias in many of the arguments. This debate referred to structural obstacles such as gender-biased laws—also a matter of concern to the Malaysian activists examined in Chapter 5—as well as the sexist and maledominated legal system and security apparatus. The very definition of 'rape' in the Indonesian criminal code, for example, does not cover domestic rape as well as many other forms of sexual violations (Harkrisnowo 1998). The requirements for witnesses and evidence are in most cases impossible to meet. To report a rape, a victim has to face a male police officer who may subject her to further humiliation.[26] Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short story 'Clara' is an illumination of precisely such humiliation (see Chapter 7).

Women activists were divided in their opinion about the urgency for victims to testify. TRKP repeatedly underlined the importance of prioritizing the victims' safety over the demands for evidence. This position was neither well accepted nor understood, and was seen by others as either an act of evasion or a refusal to cooperate with a male-dominated system that had failed to protect citizens' rights (Everett in Charlton *et al*. 1989). The decision to prioritize the victims' safety over the individual testimony ultimately alienated a number of women activists who believed that the humanitarian stance sacrificed political objectives.[27]

The statements of many women activists, though not always in agreement with the TRKP's position, indicate an effort to challenge positivistic arguments that were dominant. Taking issue with numbers and facts, women protesters stressed that violence to one woman is violence against humanity and one body is too many. They dismissed the importance of arriving at verifiable numbers of victims. In a 1999 interview, the activist Yenny Rosa Damayanti pointed out that women's solidarity also challenges the tendency to locate the crime within the boundaries of ethnicity. According to Damayanti there is a tendency for some men to consider this incident a form of ethnic aggression rather than a crime against women or humanity, because women are seen as 'men's property'. In this regard, they would be provoked only if it happened to 'their women'. To counter this attitude, one poster hoisted in a women's peace rally said: 'This is not the rape of an *Amoy* [Chinese girl], this is the rape of a woman' (*Jurnal Perempuan* 1999: 138).

In Chinese dialects, *amoy* may be used to refer to an unmarried and, usually, young woman. On the island of Java and especially during the New Order, it has come to refer pejoratively to Chinese-Indonesian females in a manner laden with sexual overtones. The term speaks to the double discrimination of Chinese Indonesian women. They are not only a minority but also a disliked Other attributed with negative stereotypes. As a result, the phrase 'the rape of *amoy*' contains within itself, albeit very subtly, a justification for the crime. The coverage of the rape issue in tabloids such as the June 1999 edition of *Aksi* entitled 'The Rape of Amoy' speaks not only of this racist and sexist tendency but also of the risk of a 'second rape' of the victims, this time by the mass media. The sexual visualization that appeared in the male-dominated mass media may be well-intended, but is problematic. Racialized and victimized images of women's bodies appeared on covers and inside investigative monographs offering telling examples of the mixture of empathy and sensationalization that emerged.

The battle over the visual and verbal representation of rape is exemplified in TRKP's efforts to launch a media campaign for the victims. Around two months after the case was made public, two advertising agencies approached TRKP and offered to design public service messages free of charge. The process of producing the advertisement was a painful tug of war between the agencies who were eager to present touching pictures of sexual victimization and the TRKP who wanted to emphasize the empowerment of the victims and women in general (the latter was indeed the message of the advertisement in the end). The text that the agency created underlined the bleak future of women whose dignity and honour had been crushed. It reflected the patriarchal ideology that sanctifies virginity and stigmatizes its loss in the victim. This was the very ideology upon which state violence was based, for sexual aggression was used to debase the moral code of the group to which the women belonged. In areas of armed conflict such as Aceh and East Timor, rapes were commonly carried out by the military on family members of dissenting groups (Sunindyo 1999; Heryanto 1998a).

Both the TRKP public service advertisement to empower victims, and the campaign that rejected portrayals of 'the rape of *amoy*', challenged the dominant sexist and racist discourse by refusing to reduce bodies to racialized sexual objects. TRKP held one of the earliest public discussions in many years on the problems of the Chinese in Indonesia and state violence. There, for the first time, people of different backgrounds discussed the 'sensitive' issue openly, albeit sometimes awkwardly and in an emotionally charged atmosphere. Another programme was the 'community-group' discussion, in which members of one community invited TRKP to facilitate discussions on racial and gender issues. After giving a brief introduction about the framework for understanding racial and gender violence, TRKP facilitators helped the group to identify problems in their community and let them discuss ideas or solutions. Six months after the riots, TRKP volunteers facilitated eleven community group discussions, ranging from small groups of 9–100 people from various social, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

A constraint that the volunteers encountered in raising people's awareness of state violence was the fragmentation of the social structure. Given that TRK was led by a Jesuit priest, some wondered whether the group had particular class, religious or group preferences in defending the victims of the May 1998 riots. In response, TRKP used the heterogeneous profile of its volunteers as evidence that the humanitarian call for activism went beyond religious, class and ethnic boundaries.[28]

There was also the sense of an inter-regional imbalance. The initial response from people outside Jakarta, even among women activists, was a feeling of unfairness that the rapes of May had received considerable media attention, marginalizing similar cases of violence elsewhere. Activists were often overwhehmed by their own specific regional issues and failed to pay enough attention to the problems faced by others and to realize the relevance of issues across regional boundaries.

Tension abated as the Jakarta-based volunteers worked with NGOs in other regions to closely monitor cases of state violence there and facilitate the establishment of emergency centres in areas of serious social unrest. By working together in different conflict areas, the Jakarta-based volunteers and the local groups managed to map out a strong pattern of state violence all over Indonesia. This mapping of the New Order's repressive structure helped the people in conflict-ridden areas to see that their plights were not unrelated. Many women's groups and organizations later adopted this strategy by holding public seminars and workshops that compared patterns of state sexual violence from Aceh to East Timor, as well as Bosnia, Croatia and other countries.

The establishment of *Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan* (Komnas Perempuan, National Commission on Violence against Women) led activists to venture a different strategy: working with the sanction of the state. In Malaysia, similar strategies have been pursued fairly often, including by women and non-governmental activists as indicated in Chapter 5. The following account of the formation of the statecommissioned Komnas Perempuan in Indonesia illustrates the complex processes of negotiation involved in efforts to bring about social change. Difficult choices had to be made between strategy and timely opportunity as well as between idealism and pragmatism.

Komnas Perempuan has its origins in the collective efforts to pressure the transitional government of President B.J. Habibie to acknowledge and take responsibility for the May rapes. The Commission collected 5,000 signatures for a petition to this effect. As the government was slow to respond, and threats to the TRK were mounting, the newly assembled group of individuals met frequently to discuss a better strategy. A meeting was arranged with Habibie through the personal relationship between the President's wife and Saparinah Sadli, a prominent woman academic who later headed the Commission. A team was then sent with several demands, among others the establishment of an independent commission to investigate the May case. To the surprise of the women, and to the alarm of his military adjutants, Habibie not only showed empathy but agreed to

publicly apologize and condemn the May violence and all forms of violence against women. Chandrakirana describes what followed as 'a historical fluke' (Interview, Jakarta, 1999). In a phone call to Saparinah the day after the meeting, Habibie suggested the establishment of a national commission for the protection of women. This suggestion led to a series of negotiations between Habibie and the women activists. The latter finally managed to push through their proposal for an independent body that handled violence against women, consisting of academics, medical professionals, NGO activists and members of state institutions. Also included were two male members, women activists from regions with serious cases of state violence, and women of ethnic Chinese background.

Bypassing governmental procedures, Habibie's idiosyncratic action served as the structural loophole through which the national body was created. Despite the long delay caused by state security and bureaucratic agencies, Komnas Perempuan was eventually launched on 15 October 1998. The opening ceremony was attended by around 600 individuals of diverse backgrounds, including military women and wives of public servants. It was one of the rare occasions when people with very different views were able to listen to opposing perspectives on violence against women during the discussion segment. In the words of a military officer's wife who sat next to me: 'All these years we held big celebrations in the army compounds, worshipping our husbands and sons coming home from battle, not knowing that their heroism was at the cost of women's blood'.

Counting on women's voices

The fourth type of activism falls squarely within what **West** and Blumberg (1990) classify as 'women's rights issues' or activism that emerges in the formal political arena. The social and political turbulence that heightened in May 1998 was the impetus for the birth of *Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan dan Demokrasi* (KPIKD, Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy). The founding of this politically oriented group, as well as the various programmes for the education of women voters before the June 1999 general elections, show that practical responses, humanitarian campaigning and *ahimsa* activism were considered insufficient by many women. These women felt the need for a high profile politics that attended to strategic needs through a strong pressure group that could intervene in the process of policy making.

On 18 May 1998 women activists in Jakarta held an all-day meeting to discuss the formation of a women's coalition as a political pressure group. Many of the initiators were involved in the founding of SIP but felt they needed a forum that could offer them a more effective means of articulating their political aspirations. [29] The following day they came up with a statement demanding the resignation of Suharto. The statement was signed by 70 individuals, including activists residing outside Jakarta who were contacted by email. The Women's Coalition organized a national congress on 18 December 1998, attended by around 500 women from

twenty-six provinces in Indonesia, in order to build an alliance of women's groups across the country.

The women's congress turned out to be a difficult but enlightening experiment with democracy. The Jakarta organizers were apparently not prepared for the difficulties of reaching a common platform given the large number of participants. The congress became a battlefield of ideological differences and disagreements on technical or procedural matters. The first battle was to decide whether the congress should be called the 'Indonesian Women's Congress' or the 'Congress of the Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy'.[30] The disagreement over names was crucial. To choose the former meant to forego the original plan of the organizers to widen the regional basis of the already established organization. Many regional newcomers had the inkling that they were just being used to baptize what the 'Jakarta women' had conceived, and wanted a 'more democratic' option. Demanding more participation in the process, they chose to see the congress in open-ended terms that would consider the possibility of setting up a women's organization and deciding on its framework and structure from scratch.

The bitter tension in the congress mirrored prevailing social and political conditions. On the one hand, the congress provided for the first time a real space for democracy. Never before were members of marginalized groups such as sex workers, lesbians, and the urban poor included in the same public forum together with women from religious groups and various other professions. Not given the opportunity to speak up for decades, however, participants literally fought to grab the microphone when discussion was opened to the floor.

On the other hand, the atmosphere was filled with prejudice and suspicion that mirrored existing political and ideological schisms. A presentation in the seminar prior to the congress by Sulami, a member of the banned organization Gerwani[31] and a political detainee under the New Order, upset many conservative groups, especially *Kongres Wanita Indonesia* (Kowani, The Indonesian Women's Congress) whose spokesperson was on the same panel as Sulami.[32] Although Kowani has a historical connection to the first women's congress held in 1928, it had since been co-opted by the New Order. As such, many activists saw it as representing the status quo. The Minister of Women's Affairs later reported to Habibie that the congress was 'infiltrated' by communists.

The congress was marked by other bitter feelings. Members of a number of Islamic groups reacted adversely to a statement made at the pre-congress meeting which said: 'the Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy resists the domination of men and Islam' (KPIKD 1998). The inclusion of transvestites and lesbians also upset the conservatives. Representatives of the working class and poor as well as many participants from outside Java suspected that they were being used to advance the political agenda of middle class women activists in Jakarta who they believed were authoritarian and arrogant.[33]

The organizers had the suspicion that state intelligence authorities had intentionally sent individuals from the rightist groups to disrupt the congress.[34]

The main political issue that emerged was the imbalance of power between the centre and periphery that was reflected in the large percentage of Jakarta representatives (more than 40 per cent of the 500 participants). The conflict reached a climax when around 100 participants walked out. At the end, those remaining managed to agree on the basic platform that included a more inclusive organizational structure in the form of a large presidium. They also elected a Secretary General. The presidium consisted of fifteen interest groups, among which were the 'sexual minorities', the urban poor and the less advantaged indigenous communities *(masyarakat adat)*.[35] Despite facing a difficult birth and internal problems, the KPIKD emerged as a national organization that held a political mandate—a position that would later be useful in lobbying political parties during the general elections.

Compared to the other kinds of women's activism discussed earlier, KPIKD was more formal and also more exclusive in determining its constituents. However, its rigid approach—the banning of male journalists from its congress, for instance—had its costs. The journalists of the national newspapers, men as well as women, boycotted the event by not covering it. This strategic error, resulting from a miscommunication among the organizers, illustrates how formalization can lead to exclusiveness. At the same time, the discord during the congress, as in the case of the previous women's congresses (Wieringa 1999), indicates that democratic pluralism instead of unification is the direction that women's activism in a heterogeneous society like Indonesia should seriously consider.

Both the establishment of KPIKD and Komnas Perempuan, each in their own ways, provided fruitful meeting grounds for women. The controversy over the paper on Gerwani during the Women's Congress led to a dialogue between KPIKD and some Kowani members, among whom were the older generation of the nationalist revolution. The Kowani women were encouraged to reaffirm their support for democracy as a result (*Kompas* 1999b). In fact, the growing resentment towards the New Order during the economic crisis enabled women's institutions that had long worked within the system to reposition themselves. For instance, Darma Wanita held a demonstration in support of the student movement on 22 April 1998 at Gajah Mada University. Not unlike SIP, these women chose to identify their cause with Kartini, an icon of Indonesian feminism who had been co-opted to support the New Order's ideology of state Ibuism (Sears 1996). The Darma Wanita demonstrated right after the ritualized official celebration of Kartini Day. The inclusion of a Kowani representative in Komnas Perempuan also led to a new dynamic in both organizations.[36] Like KPIKD, the education of women voters was another form of activism that attempted to empower women's voices in the political arena. The first Indonesian general elections after Suharto stepped down were held in 1999. Notably, it was in the same year that the first Malaysian general elections were held after the detention of Anwar. As such, 1999 was a crucial election year for Indonesia and Malaysia (see Chapter 5), and activists in both countries sought in different ways to empower the female electorate. As early

as the middle of 1998 the question of a woman national leader had entered public discussions in Indonesia. The controversy about women's political rights, however, came into full force as Indonesia prepared itself for the general elections. There were two different but related reasons for the controversy. First, the rise of women's activism and the exposure of the New Order's abuses helped many to realize that women had for the past three decades been manipulated for the benefit of the ruling Golkar party. While women made up more than 50 per cent of the eligible voters, women intellectuals and activists pointed out, their needs and rights had always been subordinated. They realized that change, be it dismantling the supremacy of Golkar or furthering democratization, would not be fruitful without empowered and informed women voters. Funding for voter education, especially for women, came from international organizations in the two months preceding the elections. During this brief period, the newspapers, magazines and television were flooded with public advertisements to enhance women's awareness of their personal right to make their own political choices.

Second, the discussion of women's political rights heightened as the prospects of a woman president became increasingly high. The popularity of the PDIP opened the possibility for Megawati to be the future President, a possibility not fully welcomed by conservative groups. Islamic teachings and laws were cited to oppose women's leadership over Muslims in keeping with the male orientation of official Islamizing bodies in Malaysia (see Chapter 5). The *Majlis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI, Council of Indonesian Ulama) even issued a religious decree rejecting women's leadership. This negative reaction invited counter-statements that led to an extended public controversy.

The public discussion of women's political rights had an impact on the women's movement in different ways. As in the case of earlier developments, it brought women and women's issues to the centre of national and public attention. The spotlight was used by feminists and activists to forward their perspectives and to socialize gender issues within the wider public. International funding also helped many women's organizations to provide political education for women in remote areas. Similar to the Women's Agenda for Change (WAC) in Malaysia (see Chapter 5), these organizations held public discussions with political organizations to ascertain their specific agendas for women, thus functioning as a political pressure group. One day before the general elections, KPIKD launched its publication of a rigorous survey of the platforms of the political parties, with analyses of their respective positions on women's issues (KPIKD 1999).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would argue that significant cultural mobility lies in the very complex dynamics of women's activism outlined above, rather than the linear and formal system that now and then elects a few women leaders to the political establishment. The four types of activism elaborated above are not exhaustive, but represent a visible manifestation of that mobility.[37]

Indonesian women empowered themselves through emergency activism that addressed economic needs as well as fostering class alliances and community-based networking amidst the grave conditions of the economic crisis of 1997–8. Similarly, women responded to violent inter-group conflict by promoting tolerance and solidarity across ethnic, religious and regional boundaries. In the wake of the May 1998 rapes, women's humanitarian activism established support systems for victims and engaged distressed urban dwellers in community discussions to prepare themselves to face social unrest. Women's rights activism led to democratic institution-building that gave space to the heterogeneous voices of women.

Women's activism employed different discursive strategies and positioning *vis-à-vis* the hegemonic forces. They made use of media-friendly issues, exploiting existing affinity groups and networking with those in power in order to negotiate for change. Motherhood and the collective identity of women were used as a means of empowerment, both as a unifying space for peace and to resist the racialization and victimization of women's bodies. Their discourses also manifested real changes in people's lives and consciousness, as exemplified in the politicization of lower middle class wives as well as middle class intellectuals in the course of SIP activism. Moreover, the discursive strategies, in many cases, were not thought up in the manner of an intellectual struggle towards a long-term goal, but in the day-to-day organization of street or emergency action to respond to urgent, and often practical, needs.

In spite of the euphoria created by women's activism in the past two years, its many contradictions and conflicts suggest that it is important not to romanticize such activism. Among the serious problems that women's movements face are the lack of human resources and coordination. As a result of the New Order's depoliticization of the middle class, women's activism in Jakarta drew a limited pool of people circulating from one activity to another. Successful as initiators and managers of small-scale action, they often ran out of time and energy to manage large-scale projects that required professional coordination and strategizing. As such, the bigger pool of middle and lower class women who had been awakened by the political crisis and prepared for activism was left unorganized and incapable of making a greater contribution to the collective cause.

Women's groups (like many NGOs more generally) have been struggling to find the appropriate organizational structure for their specific work and mission. The New Order's curtailment of mass political organizations left activists with few choices beyond creating a foundation—a formal structure that does not encourage democratic participation (see Chapter 3). By the end of 1999, many women's groups opted for more democratic forms, such as federations or loose, informal and temporary entities such as working groups. In choosing the latter, many of these groups retained the original character of emergency activism. Such activism is highly productive but usually short-lived. One of its strengths is its dynamic character. Instead of wasting energy on forming an organizational

structure and procedures, such working groups concentrate their energy on effective work.

Emergency activism has its shortcomings. Immediate action and decisions made through phone calls to close friends work well in crisis situations in order to get the work done fast. As groups grow to include other circles and establish formal cooperation with different groups, however, there is a demand for clear procedures and accountability. The emergency activism that characterizes the working culture of a small, cohesive body such as the TRKP was incongruent with the expanded organization of the TRK, consisting of many *posko* (working units). TRKP eventually separated from the main organization. Similarly, the informal voluntary spirit of SIP eventually clashed with the increasingly enterprising *Jurnal Perempuan,* when the latter included SIP formally in its structure. A separation followed in this case too. Women's activism also faced other substantial constraints such as the legacy of the New Order's ideological constructs of the 'extreme right' and 'left', unquestioned class prejudices, regional divisions and a strongly rooted patriarchal ideology supported by religious conservatives as well as ultra-nationalists.

Given all these constraints, what possibilities did Indonesian women's activism in 1998–9 offer? During one women's peace rally in which I participated, a passer-by—a mother from a poor urban settlement in East Jakarta —joined the rally and said to me: 'Please tell me how to get information about events like this one. I really like democracy.' This woman apparently confused the term *'demonstrasi'* (demonstration) with *'demokrasi'* (democracy), but what she said was telling. In an article entitled 'Of demonstrations and democracy', Tan Pek Leng suggests how political conditions actually compelled many Malaysians to conflate the two terms: 'These were no rabble-rousers but respectable and respectful citizens who were being forced to recognize that there are no other ways left for them to make the government see sense except to take to the street' (Tan 1998:18–10).

It is in the conflation of the words 'demonstration' and 'democratization' that I find the promise of change. The political and economic crisis drew women to the streets—meaning more than just being involved in demonstrations, but also their metaphorical departure from the confines of traditional and professional boundaries. The experience of activism stemming from unmet basic needs, mounting anger towards the system, or even the sheer need for the joyful release that street rallies provided, changed the lives of those involved. Women from various backgrounds, who had once been confined to particular circles, were now exposed to different realities and issues. The experience allowed them not only to make alliances among people and work in a way that respected plurality and democracy, but also to learn about gendered injustice and violence and of the ways in which women as a social category has been constructed and embedded in the dominant ideologies. Activism had finally given them the voice and opportunities to be heard.

Activism, in short, bred what Mouffe defines as democratization processes—the processes of solidarity and alliance-building, of politicization, consciousness-

raising and democratic institution-building. Whether these processes can lead to political, social and cultural change remains to be seen. Indonesian women activists acknowledge that they have yet to achieve what Malaysian women have, in enforcing more gender sensitive structures, such as special female police squads trained to investigate rape cases, one-stop crisis centres, and greater media sensitivity regarding gender and sexual issues.[38]

On the other hand, women activists in Malaysia often ask themselves if their activism is actually a 'movement' that is built on grassroots and massbased support.[39] Although inter-group alliances across class, religious and ethnic boundaries in Malaysian women's activism are not as manifest as in Indonesia, the meeting of dynamic young middle class women of all ethnic backgrounds who seek to 'move away from the norm of race-based politics' as exemplified in the WCI is very promising for the emergence of lessfragmented social formations in Malaysia.[40] Similarly, the *Reformasi* demonstrations which awakened many young Malaysians into political activism, served also as a meeting ground for people from diverse social locations. Without these democratization processes no future structural changes could ever take place.

Considering the nature of emergency activism that characterizes many Indonesian women's groups, we can expect to see the dispersion of many groups when crises abate, or the co-optation of others in the new, hopefully more democratic, hegemonic structures of the future. Yet, what is important is that the women have experienced and learned that they can use a space called 'women' or 'mothers' for democratic mobilization. In spite of existing structural constraints, the democratic experience of activism that touched the lives of many women cannot be undone, and the force towards democratic participation seems, from the present perspective, irreversible.

In Southeast Asia, the political and economic crises brought up new concern and a re-evaluation of many issues (including gender) and a resurgence of women's activism.[41] In Indonesia in particular, the economic crisis and the multidimensional upheavals that followed were a blessed tragedy for the overall cause of the women's movement.[42] The economic crisis, the May 1998 riots and the subsequent unrest touched the consciousness of many Indonesian women, including a large segment of middle class as well as working class and poor women from Jakarta whose story I have unfolded. It opened their eyes to the problem of gender exploitation within the social structures established by the New Order. It also exposed them to the striking issues of difference—religious, ethnic, class and regional—within the nation as well as amongst women. As suggested by Sunindyo (1999), this realization of both commonalities and differences has become a democratic learning experience for women activists in the capital and across the country. Without underestimating the real loss and suffering of many victims of the economic crisis, as well as of the violence, it is fair to say that women's activism made use of the constraints as well as the opportunities emerging from the turbulent period at the end of the century. When women and women's bodies seized the attention of the whole nation, activists struggled to redefine and

empower the position of women. It is also not too much to claim that women's activism, despite its internal as well as external constraints, laid a significant basis for a continuing struggle towards a more democratic civil society.

Notes

1 Interviews with Ivy Josiah and Zaitun (Toni) Kassim respectively, Kuala Lumpur, 5–6 August 1999. Both Malaysian, the former is an activist who works on violence against women while the latter ran in the 1999 general elections as the candidate of a newly formed women's initiative (see note 3).

2 The Women's Agenda for Change (WAC), endorsed by seventy-six Malaysian women's organizations and other NGOs, was the result of a national workshop held in January 1998 in which thirty-four women's organizations participated. An expanded version of a 1990 manifesto that many consider imperfect, the WAC covers eleven areas that include Women and Development, Women and Participatory Democracy, Violence Against Women, and Women, Health and Sexuality, with recommendations in each. It has also been endorsed by UMNO. See Lai (1999), *Women's Agenda for Change* (1999) and interviews with Zaitun Kassim and Ivy Josiah, Kuala Lumpur, 5–6 August 1999.

3 A new group called the Women's Candidacy Initiative (WCI) campaigned for independent women candidates in the elections of 1999. They believed that the existing political parties were not particularly concerned with women's issues beyond the purpose of winning votes. Independent women candidates were thus considered as the hope for real change (interview with Zaitun Kassim, Kuala Lumpur, 5 August 1999). Consisting of around fifteen young, multi-ethnic, middle class and urban women from Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur, WCI believed that an independent candidate would not only encourage women's active participation in politics, but also 'add new elements into Malaysian politics—a move away from the norm of race-based politics' (Hamzah 1999; Lai 1999). I am grateful to Zaitun Kassim, Saira Shameem and other friends from WCI who generously invited me to their meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 5 August 1999.

4 Lai (1999) delineates the intricacy of Malaysian women's position *vis-à-vis* the ruling coalition and the opposition. Aligning with the status quo was not a comfortable position for those fighting for real change who were critical of the state's abuse of power. Yet Lai notes that 'women's issues are being embraced by the women's wing' of the ruling coalition (1999:6). On the other hand, the opposition party PAS (All-Malaysia Islamic Party) which gained popularity during the *Reformasi* years often treated women in a derogatory manner, namely through the sexist and patriarchal remarks of its Spiritual Leader, Nik Aziz Nik Mat.

5 Among these NGOs are AWAM (All Women's Action Movement), SUARAM (*Suara Rakyat Malaysia,* Voice of the Malaysian People) and TENAGANITA (a contraction of *Tenaga Wanita* or Women's Power)—the latter advocates the rights of women workers, including domestic help. The Internal Security Act was used in 1987 in what the authorities called Operation Lallang. More than 100 people were detained without trial, including the women activists Irene Xavier, Cecilia Ng, Chee Heng Leng and Lim Chin Chin (Lai 1999). In 1995, Irene Fernandez, director of

TENAGANITA, was arrested for producing a critical memorandum on the treatment of migrant workers at detention camps operated by the state. She was charged under the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984. Cited in the memorandum was the case of an abused Indonesian domestic worker (TENAGANITA often works closely with the Indonesian NGO *Solidaritas Perempuan* (Women's Solidarity) on migrant worker issues).

6 Interview with Ivy Josiah, Kuala Lumpur, 6 August 1999.

7 With the exception of WCI, most women's NGOs in Malaysia are dominated by particular ethnic groups. Most AWAM activists, for example, are ethnic Chinese, while the majority of those in TENAGANITA are of Tamil and other Indian backgrounds (interview with Jayemary Anthony, a staff member of TENAGANITA, Kuala Lumpur, 4 August 1999). Lai (1999:10) indicates that most women activists in groups that deal with the issue of violence against women consist of 'middle class and non-Malay women'. Ng and Yong (1990:11) also speak of the 'increased ethnic polarization, gender segregation and a split between the more religious and secular Muslim Malays'.

8 I participated in the seminars and workshops held by SIP and the other groups discussed, as well as the women's congress of 1998, the interfaith prayers and peace rallies, and the early meetings to establish the Komnas Perempuan (National Commission for Violence Against Women). I joined TRKP in June 1998 and have served on the board of SIP since June 1999. Observations and analyses of other activities and events mentioned in this chapter are based on secondary readings and interviews with activists, members of groups and participants. Interviews with activists outside Jakarta and the documentation of primary materials was done with the help of Lien Sing Mey, Dyah Retna Puspita and Bernadet Rosinta Situmorang from the Women's Studies Programme at *Universitas Indonesia* (UI, University of Indonesia), Jakarta. Secondary readings and other sources were compiled by Lily Tjahjandari, Lilawati Kurnia and Sally Patinasarany from the Faculty of Letters, UI. I am particularly indebted to Kamala Chandrakirana for her valuable suggestions, Manneke Budiman for suggesting the theoretical framework and editing the chapter, and Mary Zurbuchen for assisting me with the final revisions.

9 The activist path taken by Myra Diarsi is a colourful example. A co-founder of *Kalyanamitra* (Advocacy and Information Centre for Women) and *Rumah Ibu* (Women's Crisis Centre), she was among the activists who established SIP, but subsequently moved to TRKP and KPIKD before forming her own group *Selendang Lila*. Some are involved in more than one group. Kamala Chandrakirana, Executive Secretary of Komnas Perempuan is also Chair of the Public Education Section in the TRKP and a SIP volunteer. Following her success with SIP, Karlina Leksono-Supeli joined TRK. The women's groups were also connected to one another structurally. KPIKD, as its name suggests, had member organizations, including TRKP, and both TRKP and SIP were members of TRK.

10 At the opening of the women's congress of 1998, around 500 participants banged musical instruments and made loud cries for a couple of minutes to symbolize the breaking of Indonesian women's silence. The women's event of December 1999 was also called 'breaking the silence' *(memecah kebisuan)*.

11 Personal communication from Sita Aripurnami, an activist and staff member of Kalyanamitra, Jakarta, 2 December 1999.

12 Interviews with Gadis Arivia and Toety Heraty Noerhadi respectively, Jakarta, June 1999.
13 Interview with Gadis Arivia, Jakarta, June 1999.
14 One leading weekly news magazine mounted on its cover the portrait of Karlina on a milk powder can with the following headline: 'Mengadili Suara Ibu' (Putting Mother's Voice on Trial) (*D & R* 1998).
15 See the cover of the Catholic Magazine, *Hidup* (1998), and newspaper coverage of the peace rally events in 1998 and 1999.
16 Personal communication from Karlina Leksono-Supeli, Jakarta, July 1999.
17 Interview with Karlina Leksono-Supeli, Jakarta, July 1999.
18 A more popular option in women's activism was the word *'perempuan'* and not its synonym *'wanita'*. Both words mean 'woman', with different connotations and values. *'Wanita'* is derived from the root word *'betina'* or female, thereby, according to feminists, underscoring the biological and sexual nature of women. *'Perempnan'*, commonly used earlier in history, has etymological origins in the root word *'empu'*, meaning 'master' or person occupying a high, respectable position. The preference for the former rather than the latter during the New Order showed the centrality of the politics of language under the regime. Then, the former conveyed greater respectability than the latter while at the turn of the century efforts were underway to turn things around. Many feminist and women activists tried to recapture the historical *'perempuan'* by attaching to it the ideology of political empowerment (Robinson 1997). Choosing either *'perempuan'* or *'wanita'* called up these ideological differences, thus 'mothers' in this case occupied more neutral ground.
19 Not many women were comfortable with the direct opposition strategy adopted by Ratna Sarumpaet among others. A woman playwright and theatre director, Ratna not only choreographed and directed live performances in the street that directly attacked state authoritarianism, but also initiated political manoeuvres against the New Order regime. She suffered persecution and detention for such activities (see Chapter 7).
20 Robinson (1997:157) notes as follows: Activist women in Indonesia have been able to utilize UN declarations in their quest for changes in the policy treatment of women.' The visit of the UN special rapporteur on violence against women, facilitated by Komnas Perempuan, was an example of that pressure. The street rallies on international women's days were a symbolic manifestation of this effort to link the local to the world beyond and to remind the government of its commitments.
21 This strand in Christian orthodoxy was introduced in the 1990s by Indonesians who studied in Syria and converted to the faith. For further information see Gatra (1998).
22 Interview with Wong Peck Lin of AWAM, Kuala Lumpur, September 1999.
23 The final report of the Joint Fact Finding Team mentions fifty-two rapes, with additional cases of sexual abuse and assault (Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta 1998), while the TRKP reported 156 cases (Nadia 1998).
24 Besides the groups discussed in this chapter, another humanitarian group that dealt with the May rapes was *Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa* (see Chapter 7).
25 In 1997 the PDI was split into two factions, one led by Sukarno's daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the other by Suryadi, widely believed to be a puppet of Suharto given the task of destroying the power of the populist party. A violent takeover was launched by Suryadi's followers with the support of the military forces. The attack led to riots in Jakarta. Suharto put the followers of Megawati rather than Suryadi on

trial for causing the riot, and scapegoated the relatively new leftist party PRD (People's Democratic Party) as the provocateurs of the whole incident. Megawati later reconsolidated her leadership with the support of party loyalists to lead the PDIP (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) discussed in this chapter.

26 The arrest and sexual harassment of female student protesters on 15 December 1998 in the Jakarta police headquarters was one example of the many structural problems women activists had to face.

27 Interviews with Kamala Chandrakirana, Ita Nadia and Karlina Leksono-Supeli, Jakarta, July 1999.

28 Around thirty volunteers served as the core group of TRKP. The group was heterogeneous in terms of age (from young students to retirees), profession (housewives, women in small businesses, teachers, lecturers, researchers, NGO activists, the unemployed, executives and manual labourers), religion (Muslim, Christian and Buddhist), geographical residence (Kalimantan, Maluku and Java) and ethnic backgrounds (Javanese, Chinese, Dayak and Ambonese). Interviews with Kamala Chandrakirana (Jakarta, July 1999) and Nursyahbani Kantjasungkana (Jakarta, May 2000).

29 Personal communication from Chusnul Mariyah, Jakarta, July 1999.

30 It was not a coincidence that the congress was held a few days before the celebration of Indonesian Mother's Day (22 December). Before the New Order era it was originally called Women's Day to commemorate the first Women's Congress in 1928. The Indonesian Women's Congress had been held four times, in 1928 (Yogyakarta), 1935 (Jakarta), 1938 (Bandung) and 1941 (Semarang). The first Congress gave birth to *Perikatan Perkumpulan Perempuan Indonesia* (Federation of Indonesian Women's Organizations)—the reference to 'women' in its title later replaced by 'wives'—that held its congress in Surabaya in 1930 (see Hadiz 1998). By holding the Women's Congress in Yogyakarta, the women intended to recapture the original political nuances that had been erased by the ideology of Ibuism under the New Order government,

31 See earlier section in this chapter.

32 Moreover, the first panel also featured the leftist feminist Saskia Wieringa. She discussed the political stigmatization of Gerwani women.

33 Interviews with participants of the congress, and separate interview by Lien Sing Mey, with Gedong Bagus Oka, a prominent Hindu spiritual leader who advocates inter-religious tolerance and understanding, Denpasar, 23–4 December 1998.

34 Personal communication from Myra Diarsi, one of the Jakarta organizers of the congress, 15 December 1998.

35 The exclusion of the original organizers of the KPIKD led to the formation of the new organization *Selendang Lila* in Jakarta (see note 9).

36 Personal communication from Kamala Chandrakirana, Executive Director of Komnas Perempuan, Jakarta, 1999.

37 Many other significant groups not discussed in this chapter deserve serious analysis. Bianpoen (2000) notes the roles of three women in the formation of a group called *Gema Madani* (The Echo of Civil Society). This group's initiative to campaign for a vice-presidential candidate in February 1998, one month before the presidential elections that eventually renominated Suharto, 'provoked a commotion in the nation's political discourse' (Bianpoen 2000) generating a series of discussions on the various meanings and interpretations of civil society. Women played a substantial

role as leaders, initiators or organizers in this kind of effort to empower the public through activism that goes beyond women's issues. The years 1998–9 saw the formation of organizations that used class or other collective identities such as the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC), with members including factory workers and *becak* (passenger tricycle) operators, or the *Masyarakat Profesional Indonesia* (MPI), that tried to raise political consciousness mostly among young middle class executives. Using, among others, the women's network, these groups mingled and cooperated on joint projects.

38 Personal communication from Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, the elected Secretary General of KPIKD, and Kamala Chandrakirana, Jakarta 1999.

39 This question was raised at a discussion at the Second International Malaysian Studies Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 2–4 August 1999, and resonated among Malaysian activists.

40 Earlier studies of women and party politics (Dancz 1987; Manderson 1980) suggest a limited role for women in party affairs and little fundamental change in women's traditional roles, but the activism of WCI and WAC indicates the beginnings of such change.

41 The realization that women were hardest hit by the Asian crisis was among the factors that necessitated a re-evaluation of gender issues (see David 1999). Vanaspong (1999:1) reports that 'the Asian economic crisis has made Thailand rethink its previous development model to one that focuses more on basic rights of people as well as gender equality'.

42 Particular moments of crisis and tension are crucial in forcing open the lid to enable such processes to escalate but not the origin of such processes. Mouffe (1988:94) rightly warns us of the danger of 'propos[ing] the crisis as the origin of the new social movement' as 'it leads to thinking of them as irrational manifestations, as phenomena of social pathology'.

7
Creativity in protest
Arts workers and the recasting of politics and society in Indonesia and Malaysia

Sumit K.Mandal

Activist arts workers have been visible in the oppositional movements in Indonesia and Malaysia since the late 1990s. They may be characterized in two ways. First, arts workers are diverse and cut across social boundaries, including among them women, men, workers, and farmers. Second, they are occupied with cultural production. In what other ways may arts workers be set apart from other social actors? And what is different about their aesthetic engagements from other cultural products? This chapter seeks answers to these questions in order to know what may be different about creativity in protest.

Characterizing the aesthetic engagements of artwork requires historical contextualization. This thesis is derived from a critique by Kenneth George of interventions that project the scholar's political desires onto artwork. He claims that Astri Wright attributed an overt oppositional politics to the painting *The Sun After September 1965* by the Indonesian painter A.D. Pirous, when there was no contextual evidence to support such an interpretation (George 1997:609–10; Wright 1994:163). This critique is a helpful reminder of the importance of ascertaining the political and cultural context within which art is produced. George suggests that in New Order Indonesia it was an imperative 'to keep apart in public discourse—art and ideology, culture and politics'. Having established that the state kept the arts tightly within the bounds it imposed, he sees 'little prospect in finding a politically prescient or sharply critical art in the New Order' (George 1997:629–30).

The Malaysian state's perspective on the arts has been officially informed by the National Culture Policy *(Dasar Kebudayaan Kebangsaan)* since its inception in 1971. State agencies have used the law 'to curb cultural activities that are considered "politically subversive"and "retrograde"by requiring permits for theatre, music or dance performances that may be issued only after the scripts and names of the cast have been approved by the authorities' (Tan 1992:285). Malaysians have not experienced anything close to the killing, exile and censorship in the Indonesian arts scene after 1965. It is pertinent nevertheless to note that the state in both countries regards the arts to be potentially subversive and has devoted considerable resources to monitoring its activities (see also Chapter 2).

The arts may yet be a viable space for alternative cultural politics. Tan Sooi Beng observes that state control of the arts 'has not been complete' in an essay that articulates the tensions between the state and arts workers in Malaysia until the 1980s (Tan 1992:303). In a different work from the one discussed above, Wright reaches a similar conclusion in the case of Indonesia in the early 1990s, when activist arts practices intensified with the clampdown on freedom of expression and the rise in human rights abuses by the state (Wright 1998:118). Wright differs sharply from George on the salience of the oppositional arts.

This chapter focuses primarily on arts activism during the economic and political crises in Malaysia and Indonesia in 1997–9. Mahathir Mohamad's win in the Malaysian elections of November 1999 ensured the continuity of authoritarianism, though not before he had faced historic challenges to his rule. Although Suharto stepped down in May 1998, Indonesian arts workers interviewed in November 1998-June 1999 asserted the need to continue resisting authoritarianism. Creative protests not only persisted but grew in strength with the new found freedom of expression under Suharto's successor Habibie. This chapter therefore considers the period before and after the former general's resignation.

The chapter is divided into four parts, beginning with a review of relevant theoretical approaches. The second part contrasts the worlds of high and activist art in order to provide a larger context to the tensions in the arts world as a result of the rapid economic growth and increasing affluence in Indonesia and Malaysia in the 1990s. The third part develops the central problem of this chapter fully by elaborating on the broad shape of arts activism in the two countries as well as identifying specific arts workers. Here the introduction of the Italian playwright Dario Fo's work in the two countries serves as a point of departure for discussing a significant conjuncture in cultural politics. The fourth and final part turns from arts workers as social actors to selected aesthetic engagements on their own terms.

Approaching the artworks

Before a more considered discussion of the theoretical approaches, it is worth noting some criteria for the selection of the artworks in this chapter. The artworks do not represent the countries as a whole but mainly the political culture of the metropolitan centre, where political power and economic growth have been concentrated. The locations considered are the Greater Jakarta area in Indonesia and the Klang Valley region in Malaysia (where the capital Kuala Lumpur is located). This choice has limitations, especially when much that is important culturally and politically is taking place well beyond these capitals. In this connection, Will Derks has convincingly argued for the need to pay attention to the artistic production of regional centres, particularly in the form of the oral tradition (Derks 1998:97–9). He rightly reminds the Jakarta-centred scholar of the significance of the regions on their own terms. However, at the same time, he underestimates the degree to which the written tradition in metropolitan centres

has been formative to modern Indonesian life, for instance the works of the novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer (see Chapter 2). Contrary to Derks, both the centre and the regions deserve particular attention, each for its own valid reasons. Considerations of political and social change at the national level, such as in this chapter, cannot but demand close attention to the politics at the centre.

The artworks have not only been selected on the basis of their ideological opposition to the ruling regimes in content, form and style. Rather, they have been highlighted for the creative ways in which questions and challenges are posed to regimes and societies. On the one hand, the variety of political orientations and aesthetic forms simply reflects the multidimensional character of the efflorescence of art in Indonesia and Malaysia following the 1997 economic crisis. On the other, the selection of artworks here rests on James Jasper's instructive notion that the impact of art is far more complex and unpredictable than is often assumed. Political art does not necessarily politicize, and when it does it has far more to do with the receptivity of the viewers: their existing political awareness. He thus places much weight on the development of 'political frames', or the perspectives on art gained from political education.

Much theorizing on the left has focused on the political character of art to the point of valorizing certain forms over others, and drawing 'fairly direct lines from art to politics' (Jasper 1984:172). George Orwell's memorable critique of this tendency applies nicely here: 'We are told that in our own age, for instance, any book that has genuine literary merit will also be more or less "progressive"in tendency'. He is sceptical of such a view, arguing 'the best books of any one age have always been written from several different viewpoints, some of them palpably more false than others' (Orwell 1978:141). Orwell warns against the tendency to only value artwork that is 'progressive', as creative work of high quality may exist beyond the boundaries of this label.

Jasper provides a more elaborate critique than Orwell of the problem of valorizing artworks of a progressive bent. The former acknowledges that Lukacs, Marcuse, Brecht and other Marxist cultural theorists have contributed much towards sharpening and enriching the understanding of aesthetic matters. Nevertheless, the ideologization of art by them has resulted in the neglect of the variety of possibilities and pleasures offered by art to the collective and individual. Putting the emphasis on political frames, as Jasper does, allows for the possibility that viewers may strengthen their critical political stance when viewing art that is not necessarily politically progressive in an explicit manner. Indeed, the politics of the art may even be conservative. The impact on the viewers is contingent on how they frame the artwork.

Jon Simons' critique of the emphasis of left movements on reason and the force of argument over and above deploying symbols, complements Jasper in approaching the artworks discussed in this chapter. In advocating what he terms 'fictive theory', Simons argues against the rationalist tendencies underlying left thinking, and suggests the need for more awareness of the kinds of images that resonate with people and an understanding of why they do so (Simons 1998:21).

Simons' critique is helpful to keep in mind in order to appreciate the variety of possibilities offered by the arts in advancing political and social change.

Turning to activist art specifically, Grant Kester responds to critics who believe that such work sacrifices aesthetic depth in the interest of serving political goals. Kester observes that outdated or dismissed early modern European aesthetic sensibilities based on 'beauty, taste, or the sublime' are presented in the USA today 'as the hallmarks of a new and challenging form of art that manages to be both visually seductive and politically powerful'. This turn in the arts views an overtly activist arts practice as sacrificing 'the unique power of the aesthetic to convey a subversive pleasure'. Kester nevertheless argues 'that an activist arts practice, far from being antithetical to the "true"meaning of the aesthetic, can also be viewed as one of its most legitimate expressions' (Kester 1998:7).

Art activism alone does not bring down rulers. Given this chapter's consideration of the aesthetic challenges to authoritarianism, Jasper makes the apposite observation: 'Art can have a political impact, but it rarely does, and we systematically deceive ourselves about the nature of art's impact and the conditions under which it occurs' (Jasper 1984:153). Eduardo Galeano too observes with caution that writers who are steeped in the difficult process of political and social change can 'help to create the symbols of the new reality'. Although he would not wish to claim that literature 'on its own is going to change reality', he believes it would be 'no less foolish to deny that it can aid in making this change' (Espada 1994:16).

The assertion by social actors of activist art in the public space may be an act of cultural and political self-determination against the authoritarian-led and economistic development policies in Indonesia and Malaysia. As activist arts workers and their aesthetic engagements resist commodification, they may be regarded as marginal to the market economy by definition. It may be this positioning that helps to render a particularity to arts activism, and enables its practitioners to maintain an ongoing and productive critique of authoritarianism. Arts workers may thus be included in 'the forces of the new civil society' that Yoshikazu Sakamoto expects to 'redefine the concept of economy itself, in terms of democratic accountability' and perform 'a critical cultural re-examination of the concept of "economy"premised on competition and scarcity' (Sakamoto 1997: 218). The following section elaborates on the assertion that challenges by arts workers to authoritarian rule include the recasting of society and politics in the grips of liberalization policies.

The arts industry and the activist margins

The arts has been an upmarket industry in the region, as the affluent demonstrate their cultural buying power after more than a decade of rapid economic growth. Art aficionados in Indonesia and Malaysia have made their presence felt in the global market. Christie's and Sotheby's, two of Europe's major art auction houses, maintain local representatives in both these countries. Multinational corporations

continue to sponsor the arts, unimpeded it seems by the economic crisis of 1997. The Phillip Morris Group of Companies ASEAN Art Awards, bestowing substantial prizes and prestige annually since 1994, is joined by another corporate giant. The Finnish handphone manufacturer Nokia, for whom the region is a major market, has awards bearing its name as well (Ooi 1999). Art critics, curators, managers and galleries grow in tandem as the affluent awaken to the aesthetic proclivities and values—for the most part produced in Europe—of high art (Rai 1997:80). The growth in this brand of high culture has been driven and conditioned by the disciplining politics and values of the global market.

Given the support of the ruling class and the power of globalizing cultural trends, European pretensions to high culture become completely 'normalized', even as discourses of values intrinsic to Asia and economic nationalism reign. Hence, there was little controversy when in 1998, in the thick of the economic crisis, the Malaysian National Philharmonic Orchestra was showcased within another novel symbol of modernity, the Petronas Twin Towers—reputedly the tallest buildings in the world. No more European tradition could have been chosen by the ruling elites than the orchestra. Little did the choice seem contradictory given the presiding political leadership's self-appointed role as the spokesperson for the economically weaker developing nations in the global market place, as well as for 'Asian values'. Although criticism was voiced by the arts community, it was largely confined to the Internet and insulated from the public by the pro-government mass media.

Arts workers have recast politics and society in a different mould at the same time as the tradition in high art has been in the making. Counterpoints in the arts have not necessarily been powerless in the face of the huge projects initiated by the state and private enterprises. Compelling activist artworks by the Indonesian visual artist Heri Dono and his Malaysian counterpart Wong Hoy Cheong have found their way to high profile national and international exhibitions,[1] such as the Phillip Morris Awards exhibition held in Hanoi in December 1998. A number of entries addressed forthrightly the crises of the preceding year in Indonesia. Isa Perkasa's *Indonesia Kini Sedang Luka* (Indonesia Is Wounded Today) and Ugo Untoro's *New Alphabets* both spoke vividly to the problems their country faces (Nelson 1998). Perkasa acknowledges, through a terrifying tableau of monodimensional male figures, the enormity and complexity of poverty, political violence and oppression. Untoro neatly arranges in nine rows small paper rectangles, each with a hand-drawn hieroglyph, to suggest the revamping of the existing order by the symbolic reconfiguration of the alphabet.

The great value that may be placed on activist works by bastions of high culture reveals an irony that is worth paying greater attention to than is possible here. For the moment it helps to show that the engagements of activist art do not unfold in linear and predictable ways. The possibility exists that the activist artworks showcased at international or elite venues may carry significance to oppositional movements at the national level through the coverage of the event in the mass media. The attention given by the international media to a prestigious high culture

exhibition potentially carries word of the artwork's imagery of protest much farther than an event with a lower profile. In the above instance, the critical cultural politics projected by the artworks was reported in a Malaysian daily with a sizable readership (Nelson 1998). Nevertheless, the connection of the aesthetic and meaning of the artwork to its original context may not be so straightforward as suggested here, for the artwork can exist in the market as a symbol alone (Taylor 1999:247).

To add to the complexity of creative engagements, activism on the margins need not unfold as a simple juxtaposition of classes. In other words, it is not necessarily the case that only artworks produced by working classes challenge elite constructions. The involvement and stakes of classes in cultural production are complex and interwoven. It would not be surprising for instance, should workers express admiration for the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra even though they may never attend one of its concerts. This chapter thus focuses on artworks produced across class lines that engage the state and society.

Goenawan Mohamad argues that under authoritarian rule in Indonesia, both the state and the market—alternating between conflicting and similar agendas—'threatened to colonize the arts and intellectual life' (Mohamad 1998:x-xi). Besides the increasing commercialization of artistic production, the conflict between capital and the state that may be expected in a neoliberal economic framework, is missing. This argument may apply to the Malaysian context as well. The state in conjunction with capital promotes the establishment of institutions such as the Philharmonic Orchestra at great cost while relegating the local arts to the official task of representing national identity—taking the form of dance troupes, theatre and other forms that showcase 'national culture' for foreign and local consumption. Such cultural framing is what results in reductionist claims, common in both countries, exemplified here by an official cultural body in Bandung, Indonesia: 'We can show you the real traditional Sundanese life and culture.'[2]

Activist arts workers on the other hand produce local art practices while at the same time fostering the traditional arts such as the *mak yong* (the ritual theatre traditionally performed by women in the northern states of the Malaysian Peninsula) or *wayang kulit* (shadow theatre).[3] These art forms have been given little support by the state even though they are regarded as an integral part of national culture (Tan 1992:287). In addition, they establish ties and create dialogues with arts workers, human rights activists, environmental and women's organizations (see Chapter 6) to engage the state and society in empowering ways. Although marginal to the prevailing trend in high art, arts workers are central to their societies as a source of important alternative conceptualizations of political culture, as the next section demonstrates.

Arts workers as social actors

Overview

Arts workers became increasingly engaged in activist arts practices at the peak of the 1998 crises, though their shape and substance in each country were different. In September that year, Malaysians were mobilized by the arrest of Anwar Ibrahim, the then-Deputy Prime Minister. Little over a week after this event, more than fifty members of the arts community gathered in Kuala Lumpur to express their concern and shock over the sudden arrest. The meeting led to the formation of Artis Pro Activ (APA).[4] The acronym 'APA' means 'what' in the national languages of Malaysian and Indonesian. It complements effectively the use of a question mark as the group's symbol. This organizational impetus was the first significant indication of political activity in the arts community since the detention without trial of more than 100 human rights activists, educationists, academics and arts workers in the notorious *Operasi Lallang* of 1987 (Das and SUARAM 1989:3).

Making a break from the dominant party politics based on ethnicity and religion, APA is not only multi-ethnic but representative of a cultural identity that is Malaysian in both organizational and artistic terms. Anwar's embrace of pluralist views before his arrest heralded explorations of cultural identity unfragmented by ethnic politics in the *Reformasi* era (Mandal 1998c). The formation of the multi-ethnic *Parti Keadilan Nasional* (National Justice Party) is a result of this new development. This party nevertheless works within the bounds of the fragmented electoral system that is in place. Thus it organizes and strategizes largely by keeping in mind ethnic political constituencies.

The formation of APA provided a loose organizational basis for arts activism given its stated mission: 'We believe that it is time for the arts community of Malaysia to come together again to take a more concerted, pro-active role in developing a more open society for our country, without fear or favour'. The mission statement implicitly acknowledges the historical role played by ASAS 50, the acronym used by the literary activist association formed in 1950, the activist art practices of ethnocultural groups, as well as individuals and ensembles in theatre, dance and music since indepen dence in 1957, and the protests of arts workers against the detentions of 1987.[5] Among the innovations in arts activism introduced by APA is an ongoing forum for communication and discussion on the Internet.[6] The group's most significant achievement remains the organization and implementation of an arts festival less than two months after the political crisis had erupted in Malaysia, with limited resources.

After obtaining the official permits, the arts festival was held over several weeks in October and November 1998, when a repertoire of activist art was first experimented with and showcased. APA brought together visual and performance artists, musicians, writers, arts administrators and other interested individuals. Several sympathetic individuals and groups offered assistance in a variety of ways,

including the provision of spaces to hold the events. Thereafter, as active members of APA and as individuals, accomplished arts workers actively collaborated with NGOs working on behalf of human rights and other issues. Not only did this collaboration lead to vastly improved performances at the typical gathering of the latter, but arts workers were able to travel with and explore a repertoire of new political skits, dance, poetry, music, and songs.

In early November 1998, many of those involved in the APA festival lent their talents to the series of arts events held in conjunction with the meeting in Kuala Lumpur of the Asia Pacific Peoples Assembly, the organizational alternative to the Asia Pacific Economic Co-Operation (APEC) forum. In December, many of the same arts workers participated in a number of performances held in Kuala Lumpur and adjacent Petaling Jaya in conjunction with Human Rights Day (10 December).[7] Hence the Fundraising Dinner of the human rights group SUARAM (*Suara Rakyat Malaysia,* Voice of the Malaysian People) included in its programme performances by the director and actor Jo Kukathas, the writer Amir Muhammad and the folk musician and singer Rafique Rashid—among the best known arts workers in the country. Many re-appeared on stage at the 'Human Rights Wake 1998' organized by the professional association of Malaysian lawyers (the Bar Council) and the National Human Rights Society (HAKAM). They assembled again at the variety show 'Stand Up and Be Counted' held at the Saint Francis Xavier Church in Petaling Jaya.

A greater variety of creative protests have emerged in Malaysia than is possible to discuss in this brief overview. Developments in music are nevertheless worth noting. The annual Rainforest World Music Festival was held in 1999 for the second time in Kuching, Sarawak, which constitutes one of the two Malaysian states separated from the Peninsula by the South China Sea (the other is Sabah). Musicians working within several of the indigenous traditions of Sarawak, Sabah and the Peninsula, the Dama Orchestra playing Chinese instruments, and the *Kumpulan Ghazal* (Ghazal Group) singing songs in the Malay *ghazal* tradition, represented the pluralist and hybrid elements in Malaysian culture. *Akar Umbi* (Roots), showcasing the music of the Temuan people, rendered a song lamenting the loss of their ancestral domain with the ongoing building of a dam at the Selangor River in the Peninsula (Chin 1999). Antares, a member of this group, is involved in protests as well as efforts to seek alternatives to the dam by NGOs. Sharing the stage with groups from around the world, Malaysian musicians represented an alternative politics of cultural identity and the environment. A similar politics has been advanced in such events as the concert by local arts workers to mark World Environment Day (20 June) in 1999 (Cheah 1999), though without the added possibilities of transnational dialogue and representation offered by the international stage in Sarawak.

For the most part, the arts activists described thus far tend to be urban and middle class. 'Middle class' in this context is understood not in economic terms alone but broadly as those who tend to dominate intellectual and cultural production (see Chapter 2). In keeping with this broad socio-cultural definition, it is noteworthy

that the working and living conditions of arts workers are not necessarily characteristic of their class. At least on the margins, the arts industry is neither well-paying nor well-established on the whole, even though the country has seen high economic growth rates. Such growth has spilled over to commercial entertainment but not necessarily the arts as a whole, though the lines are often not very clear. Most arts workers struggle to make a living by lending their skills to other betterpaying jobs, doing voiceovers and making appearances in advertisements on radio and television.[8] As a result, it is possible to extrapolate from here that the politics of arts workers may differ considerably from that of the salaried and propertied middle classes.

Compared to Malaysia, activism in the Indonesian arts in general has taken on more public, oppositional and dramatic stances in challenging authoritarianism. Contemporary activist art practices in Indonesia owe much to the growing response since the early 1990s of arts workers to political repression, and of course to a tradition of resistance in the arts since the 1930s.[9] Arts workers became more committed to challenging authoritarian rule, and in even greater numbers, in the months leading up to Suharto's resignation in May 1998. From early April to May alone, at least 170 performances—including poetry readings, theatre, music, video, pantomime, shadow theatre, dance and installation art—were organized in major cities by a number of regional committees linked through the Internet (Clark 1998). A substantial number of arts workers were profoundly affected by the political violence before and after 1998. The anthology of poetry *Tangan Besi* (Iron Fist) published in 1998 by the Bandung Literary Forum is but one such effort, bringing together reflections on those tumultuous times by thirteen poets including the veteran Rendra and the young Cecep Shamsul Hari, thereby taking a step towards eroding established structures and hierarchies within the arts (Forum Sastra Bandung 1998).

Arts workers have worked in partnership with social and political activists in challenging authoritarianism well before and after the end of Suharto's presidency. Perhaps no other social group is better positioned for the repossession of the public space in order to render symbolically visible the intensified efforts at democratization set in motion in the late 1990s. While many illuminating examples of such symbolic takeovers may be cited, the assemblage of cultural activities under the name *Indonesia Berseru!* (Indonesia Acclaims!) held in Jakarta in April and May 1999 is instructive. The event was held at *Gedung Joang* (Building of the Struggle), the site of Sukarno's famous independence proclamation in 1945. It was thereby an 'appeal'—and 'invitation'—to rethink the terms of Indonesia's founding itself. The organizers reconstructed the space aesthetically to represent the possibilities that may be offered by a pluralist and exploratory cultural politics of the nation (see Chapter 6).

As the list of organizers indicates, arts and cultural groups co-operated with a broader range of oppositional actors: *Jaker* (*Jaringan Kerja Kesenian Rakyat,* Network for People's Art), SNB (*Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa.* Solidarity of the Land and Nation), *Somaka* (*Solidaritas Mahasiswa untuk Kasus Aceh,* Student

Solidarity Group for Aceh), *Rakyat Papua Barat* (The People of West Papua), PST (*Partai Sosialis Timor,* Socialist Party of Timor), PWBI (*Partai Warga Bangsa Indonesia,* Citizens of the Indonesian Nation Party), and PRD (*Partai Rakyat Demokratik,* People's Democratic Party) (*Kompas* 1999a). The arts activities included the *barongsai* dance performance that had been banned under the New Order because of its Chinese cultural derivations (see Heryanto 1998b, 1999b), as well as 'resistance arts and cultural practices' *(seni-budaya resistensi)* of the peoples of Maubere (East Timor) and Aceh. Alongside these performances, discussions were held on the topics of East Timorese and West Papuan independence.

Unimaginable only a few years earlier, the constellation of pluralist cultural activities was possible because of the commitments of the particular organizations involved, SNB to name but one. The pluralism espoused, and even more so the sympathy towards separatist groups displayed, need not however have been necessarily shared by other activist groups. SNB emerged in the thick of the political violence of May and June 1998 from the early efforts to provide advocacy for the victims of sexual attacks in particular (see Chapter 6). Through the experience of advocacy work, some volunteers became conscious of the enormity of the discrimination directed against Chinese-Indonesians under the New Order. [10] SNB thereafter developed into an NGO dedicated to eliminating all forms of political, social and cultural discrimination.

The burst of activity in the arts following Suharto's resignation appears to have taken a distinctive course. In the early 1990s, Wright observes that 'symbolic and nonverbal forms of discourse gain[ed] in importance as arenas of political commentary and action, when and where the verbal channels for political discourse [were] weak or eliminated' (Wright 1998: 115). While symbolic and non-verbal artwork persisted in the late 1990s, there was a sharp rise in activism in the performance arts, often in venues open to the public without charge, and playing to large audiences. Concerts, readings, theatre, art happenings and other performing arts flourished in response to the serious crises of 1998 and 1999.

In June 1999, various rock bands under the banner of *Komunitas Seni Yogyakarta* (the Yogyakarta Arts Community) held a concert in the middle of Jalan Malioboro, a street famous as a gathering place for students, musicians and arts workers in general. [11] The rows of tent cafes where people sit in groups on low benches, and the shops filled with clothing, textiles and tourist paraphernalia, face each other on a street that sits astride the city's administration complex located on the main square in front of the palace of the Sultan of Yogyakarta. The bands, numbering a few people each, took turns on a narrow stage about two storeys high that was built on a metal framework like those used on the construction sites of multiple storey buildings. Huge loudspeakers on either side of the performance site carried the live music as far as a few kilometres away. Several thousand people filled the cafes, the streets and the square, responding enthusiastically through the night to the expressions of political solidarity and peace voiced by the organizers in Indonesian interspersed with Javanese.

The message on a banner stretched across the street inferred the communal violence that had erupted in Maluku as well as a number of other regions in the preceding months. Representing the citizens of Yogyakarta, it read as follows: 'Do not increase the suffering of the people by starting riots in our district.'[12] A large painting questioning the right of the military to special seat allotments in the lower house of parliament depicted angry groups of dispossessed people, notably farmers, voicing their protests. About 20 feet tall and wrapped in white dress and turban, a statue named *Kaisar Rakyat* (the People's Emperor) presided over the public space now turned into a performance event, armed with a mock rifle wrapped in white cloth.

Over a year after Suharto's resignation, arts activists still asserted their claims to the public space, if not more stridently. Habibie, the president at the time, was seen as not much more than a protégé of Suharto, and numerous social and political legacies of the latter's New Order remained in place. Much was wished for in the upcoming general elections. Hence the visual and performative 'reconstruction' of a microcosm of Indonesia by the takeover of the Yogyakarta street, underpinned by hopes for a more just political order as symbolized by Kaisar Rakyat. The organizers noted in one of the many commentaries and humorous asides that the seat of local government nearby 'belonged to the people'.

Many more performanees, visual art exhibitions, ritual healing events, and so forth, took place throughout the country, concentrated in the major cities with lively arts traditions such as Yogyakarta, Solo, Surabaya, Bandung and Jakarta (Hatley 1999). In the capital in particular, activist arts workers responded with vigour to some of the most momentous events that surrounded the time of Suharto's resignation. Artworks were produced to mark the killing by the army of four students at *Universitas Trisakti* (Trisakti University) on 12 May 1998—generally seen as a catalyst to the eventual departure of the longstanding president. This event was commemorated a year later in a dance performance on a grand scale, amidst protests and speeches. Live on stage, as well as in the form of images and stories carried by the mass media, the performance reached tens of thousands of people. The message of the performance in those still tense times was clear authoritarianism was not dead. The parents of the four young men killed were joined by the head of the university. Together they made public statements indicating that the New Order was very much alive under Habibie because they saw no progress in the efforts to bring to justice those responsible for the killing of their children (*Rakyat Merdeka* 1999).

This section is not intended to be a comprehensive survey but an indication of the overall shape and substance of arts workers as social actors in the respective countries. Before taking a closer look at the people and groups involved, it is worth noting briefly that arts workers in Indonesia come from a broader cross-section of society than in Malaysia. The middle classes as defined earlier are thus composed of people from a greater variety of social backgrounds, of whom a clearer picture is provided in the next section.

Conjunctures and specifics

Two independent efforts at adapting a work by the Italian playwright Dario Fo were completed in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta respectively in the first half of 1999. The consideration that follows of this unplanned conjuncture in arts trajectories sheds light on the positioning of activist arts workers in society, while introducing in greater depth some relevant arts groups and social actors. The work in question, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist,* was written in 1970 based on the death in police custody 'by accident' of the anarchist Guiseppe Pinelli. The style of the 1997 Nobel Laureate's bitingly humorous and satirical critique of the police and judiciary draws inspiration from the dramatic traditions of the *commedia dell'arte* established in the Italian renaissance (Khoo 1999a). Abandoning the conventional stage, Fo and his collaborator and wife, Franca Rame, took their highly irreverent critiques of those in power to the streets, performing for the working classes and poor in a variety of makeshift locations.

Jo Kukathas staged Fo's play in Kuala Lumpur to packed houses, thus making Malaysia one of the over forty countries world-wide where it has been performed (Instant Café Theatre 1999:2). The actor and writer participated in the APA festival and several of the human rights events discussed earlier, and Kukathas is best known in her capacity as the Director of the performing ensemble Instant Café Theatre.

Kukathas localized the play in important ways. Under her direction, the Italian political satire was transformed into a poignantly Malaysian play, executed by a multi-ethnic cast who negotiated the stage in a multiplicity of accents and languages: Malaysian English, Malay and Hokkien. As such, she notes that the play does not fall into any of the country's fragmented ethnocultural categories as it is 'not English Language, not Malay Language, not Chinese Language, not Tamil Language...but Malaysian theatre [that has] come via Italy'. Importantly, she adds 'it's ours' (Instant Café Theatre 1999:6). Kukathas articulates a Malaysian identity in two transgressive ways. Firstly, she crosses ethnic boundaries and thus champions an alternative to the politics of the ruling coalition. Secondly, she sees fit to make part of that identity a play whose origins are distinctly European and thereby dismisses claims to values distinct to Asia that have been made by Mahathir as well as other regional leaders, including Suharto.

The performance of the play was not contained within the walls of the theatre alone, but in reviews in the press, efforts to encourage voter registration, and the accompanying programme booklet.[13] A substantial number of the several thousand people who saw the play were from Kuala Lumpur's English-speaking middle classes. As such, reviews in Malay were important, they reached tens of thousands more who in all likelihood would have been eager to learn about the play given the political crisis of the time (Tehrani 1999; Mandal 1999b). Information was put up at the entrance to the theatre indicating the places and times of the voter registration drive that happened to be going on at the same time. The programme carried information such as the rights of citizens when under arrest

by the police, as well as a listing of sources for alternative views that named NGOs, political parties, media groups, and *Reformasi* websites. Articles on the playwright, on the police intelligence body the Special Branch, and the Malay farce tradition, provided a local reading to Fo's political theme and theatre tradition (Raslan 1999; Khoo 1999a, 1999b). The back cover carried the APA statement and logo, below a reproduction of Wong Hoy Cheong's *A Tapestry of Hope,* an artwork made up of thumbprints that the artist collected much like a signature campaign in order to show support for the abolition of the Internal Security Act—the infamous legacy of the British colonial era that allows for detentions without trial (see Chapter 1).

Kukathas and the Instant Café Theatre have lent their talents to human rights events on numerous occasions.[14] The theatre ensemble has made a name for itself in Malaysia and abroad through its bold political satires. They have been at liberty to launch critiques of political leaders and the government precisely because their performances have been largely restricted to the Kuala Lumpur middle classes. In other words, their audience is limited to those for whom English is the primary language of communication, an influential but much smaller social group than Malay speakers in the country as a whole (Mandal 2000). This does not diminish, however, the theatre ensemble's role in demonstrating the ability to resist in a climate where freedom of expression is monitored closely by the state. Such demonstrations increasingly 'escape' ethnolinguistic boundaries through reviews and discussions in translation, as noted above. Furthermore, as Kukathas develops the brand of Malaysian theatre she advanced with the adaptation of Fo, her work may draw audiences from a greater cross-section of society.

Instant Café Theatre's impact on political life may at times take an unpredictable and circuitous route. In November 1998 the ensemble was invited to perform at an after-dinner show for delegates attending the APEC trade liberalization negotiations. An Indonesian official reportedly left in protest when the group replaced 'Fernando' with 'Suharto' in the Swedish band ABBA's popular song, to sing 'Do you hear the drums, Suharto' (AFP 1998). News of the event was distributed in Malaysia through the Internet, bringing kudos to the ensemble at a time when anti-government sentiment—associated with anti-Suharto feelings at the time—was at its height.

To return to the adaptation of Fo, the writer Faisal Tehrani commends Kukathas and her cast for their courage and describes the play as a statement from the 'stage of the middle class community that is very important' (Tehrani 1999:79). He credits the play with raising the audience's consciousness of political matters and believes that the multilingualism on stage was no small matter, for it spoke to Malaysia's social reality. Faisal's observations confirm the view suggested earlier in relation to APA, that the artistic expression of an ethnically diverse but unfragmented Malaysian cultural identity is subversive and engaging.

Taking the perspective of the downtrodden, Fo's play unmasks with laughter the insanity and cruelty of state agencies when they become instruments of repression. From his creative experience in championing the underclass emerges

a language that challenges the powerful in a profoundly funny way. This language found a home in Malaysia as arts workers challenged authoritarianism. Kukathas' production of the subversive aesthetic of Malaysian identity incorporated the struggles of the working classes and poor, thereby localizing Fo's politics as much as his dramatic style and content.

It should not be surprising that Fo's work found a home in Jakarta as well. Antonia Soriente and Prasetyohadi produced a translation of Fo's play in the cultural journal *Kalam,* published by a group of arts workers and intellectuals belonging to one of the city's independent cultural groupings: *Komunitas Utan Kayu* (the Utan Kayu Community). The translators' foreword locates the playwright's fascination with madness during his childhood in Portoaltravaglia, a small town with the highest percentage of the insane in Italy (Fo 1999:20). This fascination is developed into a theatrical persona, so to speak, of resistance against political and cultural repression—hence the foreword is titled 'Madness and Resistance'. The Nobel Prize was granted to Fo largely on the merits of the political resistance his work embodies. The translators observe that the playwright was believed to have 'opened the eyes of people to the tyrannies and injustices in society, while widening the perspective on the history of the struggle of the underclass' (Fo 1999:22). Goenawan Mohamad, the poet, journalist and founder of the magazine *Tempo,* whose banning in 1994 is discussed in Chapter 2, was central to the establishment of Utan Kayu. His primary goal was to 'open up spaces' with the hope that there would be dialogues and collaborations between arts workers, academics and journalists.[15] Utan Kayu was initiated in 1996 with the establishment of a gallery that provided an alternative to the major and market-oriented galleries in the city. A small theatre space was set up where performances were held and films were shown on the basis of voluntary contributions of money. In exhibiting artworks disliked by the state or those containing sharp political and social critiques, Goenawan believes that Utan Kayu has offered resistance, 'symbolic or otherwise', to the 'power of capital and the market'. The purpose here is 'to cultivate an independence of perspective, in ourselves, in the artist and in the viewer' (Mohamad 1998:xi).

On the whole, independent arts communities have acted as a point of convergence for social and political activists as well as arts workers, academics, students, and so forth. Utan Kayu and its counterpart Galeri Café Cemara 6 tend to have discussions of theory that attract intellectuals but at the same time hold poetry readings and performances that draw a much wider audience (Budianta and Gunadi 1998:24). These communities provide the space for a variety of activities that include the possibility of producing a polished translation into Indonesian of Fo's work, thereby allowing for its eventual local stage adaptation. Prasetyohadi, the co-translator of the text, is a researcher at the Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information that is part of Utan Kayu.[16]

Other arts workers nonetheless have been actively championing creative and political concerns similar to those of Fo. Moelyono applies the ideas of the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire in his efforts to advance the 'visual arts of

conscientization *[seni rupa penyadaran]*'. His art practice has enabled him to engage workers in political issues through community theatre and to create a forum for the discussion of social issues among displaced farmers through the revitalized Javanese trance dance *jaranan*—banned since 1965 (Moelyono 1998; Plummer 1998). The Yogyakarta-based collective *Sanggar Suwung* (Pocketmoney Studio) advocates working in rural areas in order to 'socialize the arts *[memasyarakatkan kesenian]*'.[17] Its members believe that rural communities have become familiar with the terms and abstractions of activist art practices and respond well to the work they do. Driven largely by the volunteerism of students at the arts academy of *Universitas Taman Siswa* (Taman Siswa University), the collective is committed to combating elitism and commercialism in the arts.[18] Two arts workers who are also reframing the arts are discussed in greater depth below: the performance artist Agus Nur Amal and the worker-poet Wowok Hesti Prabowo.

Agus Nur Amal is contesting elitist definitions of the arts by exploring and advancing the traditional Acehnese monologue performance *PMToh*.[19] His solo performances are based on folk themes such as the odyssey of a young child in search of a rare cure for his ailing mother. This theme is introduced as a simple story 'of an ageing mother and her child' that has nothing to do with 'soldiers and politics'.[20] Working with a few basic props—like a red helmet, to render both the turtle that transports the child as well as the armed forces—he nevertheless weaves a humorous and touching epic tale of the child-hero's victories against none other than the head of the armed forces and the President—Wiranto and Habibie respectively—in June 1999.

At thirty-one, the Aceh-born performer teaches at *Institut Kesenian Jakarta* (Jakarta Institute of Art) and is dedicated to cultivating the arts from the perspective of the oppressed in the content and aesthetic of his craft as well as to the audiences he entertains.[21] Although it would be financially rewarding, he chooses not to perform for the 'economic middle classes'—giving nuance to his naming (the word 'amal' means 'charity')—for whom he believes there is no shortage of entertainment. He prefers to perform in working class and poor rural communities as well as among children who peddle goods on city streets. He strives to convey through his art practice the 'extraordinary ideas' and 'principled political views' of the underclass.

Agus engages through performance the problems in Aceh created by the excesses of the military and Jakarta's political elites. The child-hero sets out on his epic journey from Aceh and is able to remain magically in contact with his mother despite the distance he travels. As the story unfolds so too does the complexity of political interests involved in the ongoing subjugation of Aceh. At the same time, the child-hero symbolizes Acehnese resistance. Besides exploring aesthetic avenues, Agus is involved in activities to assist the Acehnese that include working with NGOs collecting data on human rights violations.

Wowok Hesti Prabowo is a poet whose worldview has been profoundly shaped by the life he led as a factory worker for more than a decade. Smokestacks, the whirring of machines, *indomi* (instant noodles), chemicals, products such as

plastic, tiles, shoes, garments and steel, as well as strikes and lay-offs make up the imagery in his poems. In 'Here I am like a horse *[Di sini aku seperti kuda]'* the poet remembers a time when his younger sibling would ride on his back, with him on all fours, as if he were a horse. The nostalgia takes a surprising twist when it is revealed to be the hopeful memory of a worker for whom, as shown in the following fragment, the factory becomes a prison:

> as a horse i can neigh but cannot speak
> all day i sow obedience in every corner of my heart
> i relent when suddenly the machines have become walls
> without doors without windows. i am confined by them. [22]

The unexpected turn in context, and the sharp contrast in mood as the poem shifts from playing horse to becoming a human beast of burden, underscores the oppressive conditions of factory work.

At first mention—in the title—the simile seems neutral if not innocuous. However, by the end it conveys the dehumanization of the worker: 'here I am like a horse with a heart that has been smothered *[di sini aku seperti kuda dengan hati yang tlah dipabrikkan]*' (Roda Roda Budaya 1998:34). Wowok's rendering of the noun *'pabrik* [factory]' as a verb, here and on other occasions, is a noteworthy innovation that poses problems in translation. When expressed in the passive voice as *'dipabrikkan'* in the line in question, the literal translation ought to be 'factoried' or perhaps even 'manufactured'; neither are idiomatic in English nor do they convey the meaning in Indonesian.

Wowok's language poses problems in translation because it is fresh and speaks anew to the experience of workers. *'Pabrik'* in Wowok's poetry means 'to confine', 'to imprison' or 'to smother', as translated in the above instance. His sense of the word is best invoked by the fragment where the factory's machines turn into confining walls. Among the other instances of Wowok's use of *'pabrik',* two occur in an entirely different voice and context, namely in the poems where he speaks up to Habibie and Mahathir respectively: 'From the Country of Factories 1–2 [*Dari Negeri Pabrik* 1–2]' (Prabowo 1999b: 15–16). Instead of 'to smother', the verb derived from *'pabrik'* has been rendered as 'to stopper' and 'to stifle' in the respective poems.

Dedicated to Habibie, the imagery of the first poem suggests a routine presidential visit to a factory. However, a banner welcomes him to another country so to speak, where with more than a little sarcasm he is asked to behave like the 'robots' who live there. When he laughs at the robots, he is reprimanded and in the final line warned: 'sooner or later they will stopper your mouth *[cepat atau lambat mereka akan memabrikkan mulutmu]*' (Prabowo 1999b: 15). The second poem—written in Johor Bahru, Malaysia in 1999 and dedicated to Mahathir—captures the fear that this leader seems to have instilled in his citizens, thereby transforming them into obedient 'robots'. The poem nevertheless casts doubts on autocratic methods, advising Mahathir in its last two lines to 'stop stifling voices

before the obedience breaks' *[berhentilah memabrikkan suara-suara sebelum kepatuhan itu patah]* (Prabowo 1999b: 16).

At thirty-nine, Wowok is a well-known poet and one of the driving forces behind the growth since 1995 of workers' poetry as a literary genre (Budianta 1999:ix-x; Prabowo 1998). He has been instrumental in promoting this genre through several organizational initiatives including the publisher *Roda Roda Budaya* (Wheels of Culture) that produced an anthology of fourteen poets from the industrial zones of Tangerang and Kudus in Java (Roda Roda Budaya 1998). The aim of these efforts has been to recast the elitism of poetry and literature from the perspective of workers. As such, Wowok has endeavoured to encourage the art as a means of self-actualization for workers, while combatting the negative stereotypes they have had to suffer as a social group historically. While workers have been portrayed under authoritarian rule as ' "human robots", low class human beings, stupid, poor and even rebels', today he believes the literary world cannot but take notice of them as culture producers (Prabowo 1999a: vii-viii).

The serial poems discussed above are significant examples of Wowok's creative positioning of workers, though not the strongest examples of his creative ability. The 'country of factories' is not a foreign land, but none other than Malaysia—as the second poem reveals—and, by inference, Indonesia. By speaking of factories, the poet brings attention to the workers who have been essential to the economic development of these countries and yet remain marginalized as a social group (see Chapters 3 and 4). Not only are working classes prominently repositioned but a language of representing their voice and concerns is found. The 'country of factories' allows the poet to speak on behalf of a social group and space common to both countries and delivered by the industrialization that has underpinned the authoritarianism in each instance. Hence the poet is able to link and critique Habibie and Mahathir in one breath.

The poet Eka Budianta has described Wowok as a voice of the most recent phase of industrialization in Southeast Asia as a whole and Java in particular (Budianta 1999: ix). Given the historic transformations set in motion in this phase, the growth in workers' poetry as a literary genre is not a coincidence. The poetry may be uneven, as Eka observes of some of Wowok's work, but it has necessitated the search for a new language grounded in workers' experience—hence the creative uses of *'pabrik'* (Budianta 1999:x). In addition, by asserting the creative aspirations and concerns of the world of industrial zones, it has challenged established norms in the arts and in society under authoritarianism. Like Fo, worker-poets are advancing the perspective from below, through art. As such, when voices from the 'land of factories' resonate as powerfully as the poems of Wiji Thukul for instance, they speak for the generation that struggled against Suharto's rule in its closing years.

Wiji Thukul's poems express the zeitgeist of the era of oppositional movements and have been meaningful to the countless numbers of people who have contributed towards the democratization of politics. Wowok, for instance, has shown his admiration and respect for Wiji in a number of ways, including writing

a poem in his name (Prabowo 1998:29). For many, the last line of Wiji's poem *Peringatan* (Reminder/Warning) has served as a source of inspiration: *'maka hanya ada satu kata: lawan!'* (then there is only one word: resist!). At an event in Semarang in 1994, the poet read this work in a fiery performance to which Derks attributes the cathartic awareness of shared experience in the audience—resulting in the kind of solidarity that his works have been known to foster (Derks 1996:46).

As exemplified by Wiji, the cost of creative protest can been high. Not only did he suffer extremely poor working and living conditions, the young poet was terrorized by the security forces due to his public stature as an activist arts worker. He is feared dead or rather 'disappeared' like other radical young activists.[23] While middle class arts communities such as Utan Kayu were regularly monitored by the state, and even stormed by armed policemen (Mohamad 1998:xii), they were spared the brunt of state violence. Workers arts groups, however, were, like Wiji, consistently and severely harassed by the security forces, and faced great difficulties in obtaining permits for their events, because they were regarded with much suspicion by people in power (Budianta and Gunadi 1998:32–3; see also Chapter 4).

The preceding review of efforts to advance the arts from below suggests that there is considerable attention in Indonesia to art practices grounded in the social realities of the working classes as well as the urban and rural poor. The Malaysian visual artist and educator Wong Hoy Cheong believes that the same is not true of his own country.[24] Familiar with the arts in Indonesia, he is sympathetic to Moelyono's efforts at advancing the 'visual arts of conscientization'. He suggests that the arts worker is responding to a 'level of distress' that is greater in every sphere—the 'geological', 'environmental' and 'political'—in Indonesia. The 'distresses' in Malaysia, he believes, are less 'traumatic'. Wong's argument is presented here in much simplified form to convey some possible explanations for the different trajectories in the arts of the two countries. In sum, he suggests that art practices have emerged in response to the specific historical, environmental and even geological conditions—Malaysia falls outside the volcanic zone that subsumes much of Indonesia.

Wong's artwork is activist in orientation. The *Tapestry of Hope* described earlier is an example. It has been said of his artwork that it 'represents an extension of his belief in upholding human dignity and freedom' and that 'his exhibition history reveals a continued engagement with political accountability and human rights' (Fan 1999). However, Wong does not believe that he is able either to reach a wide enough audience or to raise political awareness significantly through the visual arts. As such he has also opted for involvement in party politics. For several months prior to the general elections of 1999, he campaigned on behalf of *Parti Rakyat Malaysia* (People's Party of Malaysia).

This arts worker believes that he is able to empower people most effectively through teaching art. The arts need not necessarily 'touch on social or political issues', he observes, as 'the very act of creating art, is an act of liberation'. The

creative process entails an internal reflection about the aesthetic, such as when the art student asks if a painting really reflects what she or he wishes to say. This reflection engenders critical thinking that can be extended to social and political issues. Wong concedes, however, that most of his students at the Kuala Lumpur college where he teaches would not make the leap in consciousness.

Some efforts in Malaysia to frame the arts from below became visible to wider audiences as a result of the political crisis in 1998. A three-person group called The People Band was showcased at one of the events commemorating Human Rights Day, that have been discussed already.[25] This group has a repertoire of songs in Malay and English that explore the lives and struggles of workers, typically in cash crop plantations. The band focuses on empowering the workers in question through its art practice.

In another development, university students braved the many threats and strictures issued by state educational authorities to appear in rallies and other political gatherings equipped with oppositional poems and skits. These art practices nevertheless are not strictly framing the arts from below as they do not constitute studied engagements with the working classes, poor and marginalized. They are better described as efforts to bring art to the streets. More than fifty students gathered outside the National Mosque in Kuala Lumpur for an all-night poetry reading in April 1999, on the eve of the judgement in Anwar Ibrahim's trial. Students, political activists, opposition party members and others read resistance poetry from all over the world, notably Indonesia.[26]

References to Indonesian activist art practices became more commonplace in Malaysia after 1998. Pramoedya Ananta Toer was mentioned in more than one instance, most famous of which was Anwar's declaration that the Indonesian author was an inspiration to him behind bars (*FEER* 1999; Mukhtar 1999). The political cartoonist, Zunar's writing on the Indonesian rock musician Iwan Fals is nevertheless an effort worth elaborating to provide a better understanding of the culture and politics of arts workers who challenged the New Order (Zunar 1999).

Complete with the lyrics to five of Iwan's popular songs of social and political protest, Zunar locates the musician in collaborative efforts with a variety of well-known Indonesian arts workers, including Setiawan Djody, Sawong Jabo and Rendra. The cartoonist notes that 'the spirit of protest has for a long time flowed in the blood of the Indonesian arts' (Zunar 1999:30). He makes three important observations with respect to this 'spirit of protest'. First, he suggests that activist arts workers in Indonesia such as Iwan have paid attention to the problems of the dispossessed. Second, given this attention they have played a role in advancing political change long before the cries of *Reformasi* were first heard. Third, they have been successful in their efforts by working together. Zunar asks in conclusion, if arts workers in Malaysia might be able to collaborate as fruitfully.

It is worth returning to the adaptations of Fo in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta respectively, in concluding this part. Was the conjuncture in arts trajectories fortuitous? Kukathas as well as the writer Faisal first envisioned seeing *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* staged in 1996 and 1997 respectively, well before the

political crisis of 1998 (Instant Café Theatre 1999:6; Tehrani 1999:78). The early enthusiasm both these arts workers showed for the play suggests that Fo's language speaks to the everyday oppressions of authoritarianism that were evident before the elite political crisis unfolded at the end of the century.

As social actors, arts workers have been concerned with exploring freedom of expression and the perspective from below long prior to the political crises of 1998 in Indonesia.[27] Agus Nur Amal observes that the arts had explored well beforehand many of the key issues of freedom of expression and democracy that entered the public discourse with vigour when repressive measures were lifted in the post-Suharto era. He goes so far as to say that the terms of freedom of expression within creative communities had already been debated once the repressive measures were lifted in the post-Suharto era, while still new to the mass media.

Arts workers as social actors have worked to keep cultural spaces and options open. It is not only physical spaces such as the independent arts communities that are meant here, but the room to assert pluralistic perspectives on society. Or, as Putu Wijaya puts it: a problem may have more than one answer.[28] Take the issue so central to both the Malaysian and Indonesian state: nationalism and nationhood. This playwright and writer's pluralism has led to the position that the nation is a useful concept in periods of crisis but not at other times. The visual artist Agus Suwage is similarly unbounded by rigid nationalism as he is less concerned about whether his work is 'Indonesian', than with metaphors and images of protest against violence and repression (Suh and Seno 1999).

The Utan Kayu Community, Moelyono, Sanggar Suwung, Agus Nur Amal, Wowok Hesti Prabowo and Wiji Thukul in Indonesia, and the Instant Café Theatre, Wong Hoy Cheong and The People Band in Malaysia, represent different positions in each nation's arts communities. They have nevertheless faced the common challenge of authoritarian rule. As a consequence, these disparate arts workers from different strata of society have been struggling to articulate a sense of political community—like Kukathas' unfragmented Malaysian identity or a genuinely pluralist Indonesia in the event 'Indonesia Acclaims'. As such, arts activists anticipated and absorbed Fo's work because it spoke to their creative protests. The Italian playwright's arrival on the shores of both countries in 1999 was not coincidental but timely.

Aesthetics of engagement

As seen in the preceding section, activist arts workers as social actors have contested the arts as an elite preserve and created spaces for a wide range of cultural production sharply oriented towards empowering those on the margins of society. This part focuses on the cultural production itself. Although the role of arts workers in society and their aesthetic output are intimately connected, the purpose here is to examine separately and more closely the possibilities offered by the latter on its own terms. Once completed, artwork is no longer the possession of the arts worker alone but the wider public with which it is engaged. What is peculiar about

the aesthetic engagements of arts workers with politics and society? The discus sion that follows is organized around three themes that may be said to have characterized aesthetic engagements: stating the unspeakable, demonstrating resistance and remembering. A few arts workers from Indonesia and Malaysia form the focus: Ratna Sarumpaet, Shahnon Ahmad and Seno Gumira Ajidarma.

Stating the unspeakable

Representing gross forms of political violence that in everyday parlance are said to be 'unspeakable', 'inhuman' and 'unimaginable' has been a challenge that arts workers have faced squarely with positive results that are perhaps impossible to reproduce through written or electronic documentation. Artists have been able to render speakable, human and imaginable, the acts of terror that have so characterized the New Order for instance. The case of the sexual and physical violence that was inflicted on the body of the 23-year-old labour activist Marsinah in 1993 became the focal point of arts activism. She was kidnapped, raped and left to bleed to death on the side of a road after her vagina was brutalized with a sharp object. Although her killers remain unidentified, it is clear that she was targeted because she had risen from the factory floor to speak up on behalf of fellow workers.

Goenawan Mohamad notes that the killers must have been sure, when they left her body strewn on the roadside, that it would merit nothing more than perhaps a column in the local newspaper (Mohamad 1997:x-xi). However, the times had changed and it was no longer possible to simply ignore the exploitation of workers or women. Marsinah became an important catalyst and rallying point for the anti-Suharto movement because her case so clearly showed the violent repression of workers and women under the New Order. Arts workers took on the task of addressing the violence inflicted upon her. For example, the visual artist Moelyono produced an installation to commemorate the mysterious killing of the labour organizer for an exhibition in Semarang in 1993, only for the event to be banned by the local police (Derks 1996:50). Marsinah's story even reached the shores of Malaysia. She inspired the mixed media work entitled *Dari Seberang Untuk Seberang* (From Malaysia for Indonesia) by David Wong Tay Woei, a young Malaysian artist.[29]

Ratna Sarumpaet took on the challenge of speaking through performance art about the sexual, personal and brutal violence that killed Marsinah. In a play first staged in 1994 and two monologues performed in 1997–1998, the playwright found a means of telling Marsinah's story by locating it in the afterlife. As the characters took the form of spirits she was able to 'say whatever she wanted, from whichever perspective' (Sarumpaet 1997:xix). The artistic licence here is critical for there is a likelihood that the details of Marsinah's killing may never be known, at least not precisely. Nevertheless, there was enough evidence for Sarumpaet to imagine and reconstruct the events on stage.

In the monologue *Marsinah Menggugat II* (Marsinah Accuses II), performed in Jakarta in 1998, Sarumpaet played Marsinah in the afterlife, dressed in a white flowing robe.[30] The auditorium at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta was hot and packed with more than 300 people, many filling up the floor space around the stage. Sarumpaet acted out scenes of violence against Marsinah through her recollections in words, voice, sounds and gestures. Despite the overly literalist approach, Sarumpaet rendered the terrifying ordeal far more memorably to the audience than any realistic account, say with mock injuries to her person. The story of the play and monologue extend well beyond the violence, the second monologue also being a sharp critique of how little things had changed after Suharto. However, its strength was in rendering imaginable and unforgettable the gross violation of the human body. Sarumpaet self-consciously addresses the exploitation of women and workers in particular through her work on Marsinah, a focus that does not cease to throw up challenges. The second monologue was dedicated to Martadinata who was murdered because of the volunteer work she was doing with the victims of the mass rapes in 1998 (see Chapter 6).

Ratna Sarumpaet's 1998 performance made the claim that authoritarianism was not dead in the post-Suharto era, as Marsinah's killers had yet to be found. The play was nevertheless objected to during the New Order as well. Sarumpaet became a rallying point for arts activism when in December 1997 she was prevented from performing her play by the police in Surabaya, after she had done so in seven other cities. The Jakarta Artists' Solidarity Group issued a statement of protest delivered to the National Commission for Human Rights noting that the case 'eloquently demonstrates that creative freedom in Indonesia is under threat', and called for the government 'to respect and uphold the rights of the people to freedom of opinion and creativity' (AJI 1997).

Sarumpaet believes that the international attention has added to the play's strength and impact within Indonesia.[31] When she was jailed for seventy days in 1998, her contact with international women artists led to a much publicized plea and the establishment of a website on her behalf by a playwright based in the United States (Eisenstein 1998). All in all, this as well as other international efforts, not only worked on her behalf but continued to publicize her efforts to protect the human rights of women and workers.

This playwright and author has brought her artwork to the streets as part of broader protest actions. However, this action alone does not convey the theme to which the next section turns. 'Demonstrating resistance' in the following suggests a protest that is grounded in the creativity of the arts worker's media and not necessarily solely and explicitly an art practice that is antithetical to the state.

Demonstrating resistance

After Anwar was found guilty in April 1999 of abusing his position when he was Deputy Prime Minister, and slightly before Kukathas' staging of Fo in the same month, rumours circulated in Kuala Lumpur of a book written by the national

laureate Shahnon Ahmad. Thus the political satire *SHIT* (Ahmad 1999) announced its arrival as a dramatic literary protest against Mahathir. Books had been produced by state and opposition groups to fight political battles in the preceding year. Most infamous was the publication that may have been part of an overall effort to topple Anwar. Published months before his removal the book listed '50 signs why Anwar ought not to be Prime Minister' (Jafri 1998). This effort resulted in murmurs, curiosity and speculation of some consequence over the elite political manoeuvres it appeared to herald. Shahnon's publication, however, was historic, for it roused unparalleled popular interest for a novel, and resulted in much public debate about political life and the arts. It is this debate and the particular as well as the significant oppositional trajectory the novel and the author took that is of interest. Shahnon's religious conservatism and racialized perspectives as well as an analysis of the book's content are not immediately relevant. As noted earlier, the political impact as well as the uses and abuses of art are not necessarily predicated by its obvious political orientation or even quality. Most importantly, because it is perceived to be 'creative' or 'cultural' production, it has specific values attached to it as well as potential mobility.

SHIT was a demonstration of resistance for the public given the quiescence of the literary world, the mainstream mass media, and other institutions and public figures, with regard to the most significant political crisis in the country's recent history. Shahnon rebelled against this state of affairs by producing a novel whose title itself—let alone content—would surely be controversial. The book's alternative titles are 'PM' and 'PukiMak'. The first is easily recognized as the abbreviation in Malay and English for Mahathir's position, *Perdana Menteri* (Prime Minister). The second is a common and strong expletive. In the book, the author directs a thinly veiled attack against the political leadership in a derogatory and scatological language.

The early chapters of the book develop the putrid atmosphere within the intestines while introducing the characters, principally PM who is the tyrannical and corrupt head of a train of faeces, and his protagonist Wira, a lightly disguised representation of Anwar. The plot of the book is to remove PM and his yes-men —the train of faeces—from the bowels of power so to speak. The author undoubtedly felt a great deal of revulsion towards the political developments and intended to convey that, as well as his anger, to his readers. His elaborate description of the bowels may repulse many. However it was meant to do so. The author felt that too much of the literary and cultural establishment in Malay language literature had become 'blind conformists', not least through the receipt of prestigious honorary titles and awards, including the title of National Laureate that he himself holds.[32]

Responses to the book were expressed in dramatic language equal to the commission of a sacrilegious act, a view that aptly reflects the embeddedness of the Islamization process analyzed in Chapter 5. The Literary Prize Panel consisting of the Minister of Education and other luminaries unanimously declared the contents of the book an 'insult to leading figures in Malay literature while lowering

the cultural value of Malays and Islam in the eyes of other peoples' (Bakar 1999). The Minister stated that the book was not going to be banned, leaving it to the public to evaluate its contents themselves. This liberal approach, however, was resisted in an area where the Ministry exercised some direct control. It was banned in all state-run school and public libraries in the country for fear that it would 'ruin the minds of students through its use of pornographic words and invective' (*Berita Harian* 1999).

Articles about the book, as a result of the controversy set in motion, including those condemning it, ensured that even more people were exposed to Shahnon's message. The many attacks on the book included one from another national laureate who believed reading the novel would constitute a sin (Muhammad 1999a). The discussions that emerged nevertheless included many lively and interesting elaborations of the novel. Alternatives to the official line were often richly nuanced arguments about the place of literature and language in society. The writer Kanaga Saba made a strong argument that the novel conveyed with success its visceral *leitmotif*: the reader should experience the very disgust and hate felt by the author. Through the use of the technique of repetition, Kanaga believes that Shahnon intended to 'sow hatred towards the protagonist *Shit* [and invite] the reader to join him in hurling invectives' (Saba 1999:38).

The book and its author were showcased at a local university in an atypical move for a state-sponsored institution, especially during a protracted political crisis. A lecture and discussion attended by over 100 people was held at the main auditorium at the National University of Malaysia in June 1999.[33] The poster advertising the faculty-only event described it as a dialogue with the author and made reference only in small print to the 'great deal of controversy the novel had caused'.[34] The footnote did not fail to mention that the Department of Malay Letters had invited the author to the university to view the novel 'from an academic perspective'. Students were nevertheless present in the packed auditorium and a heated presentation was made by the author in which he spoke of the book and criticized Mahathir with little restraint. Given that the country had been enveloped in intimidating and repressive actions for nine months, the event suggests that faculty members were frustrated enough to take risks. The sponsoring department nevertheless took advantage of the possibilities offered by the arts and academia as spaces for intellectual exploration, difficult and embarrassing as it would be—though not impossible—to ban a discussion on the literary merits of a book, written by no less than a National Laureate.

Shahnon's attack was all the more effective and historic because it reached a huge audience. The novel's first print run of 15,000 copies was completely sold out within the first two months of its release, following which thousands more were reprinted (Muhammad 1999b). As the book became a much sought after commodity, copies were produced without the author's permission from what appear to be a number of different sources. Pirated copies of the book alone quite easily reached tens of thousands of readers, perhaps as many as 100,000.[35]

The government was unable to take any action against the circulation of *SHIT* as it was first and foremost a satirical novel and not a documentary account of contemporary politics. A ban could have been cause for further embarrassment as such. Nevertheless, the question of banning the book was rendered moot because it was popular and circulated quietly through numerous informal and formal channels. A ban may have only made it even more popular or transformed the author into a hero, and this possibility did not go unnoticed by the government (Muhammad 1999b; Chapter 2). *SHIT* was a historic performance of sorts by Shahnon. The book may be memorable in this regard, though it may not have crafted a language of profound and durable influence. The next section turns to such a language, namely one that 'remembers'.

Remembering

Much has been erased, excluded or obfuscated in the official record in Indonesia and Malaysia. In Indonesia, 'forgotten' in this manner are women workers such as Marsinah, dozens of activists who have 'disappeared', and displaced farmers, to name but a few examples from more recent times. In Malaysia, forgotten are leaders of left movements such as Ahmad Boestamam, foreign workers (including hundreds of thousands of Indonesians), and social and political activists who have been detained without trial, intimidated and tortured.

Through writings that have explored and brought to light some of the oppressive social realities under the New Order, arts workers such as Seno Gumira Ajidarma may be said to be engaged in 'remembering'. His 1999 collection of short stories *Iblis Tidak Pernah Mati* (The Devil Never Dies) is divided into three parts with the following headings: *'Sebelum', 'Ketika', 'Sesudah',* and *'Selamanya'*. These markers of time—'Before', 'Then', 'After' and 'Forever'—are framed around an act of remembering the entire period surrounding the historic riots of 1998 when thousands were killed or died as a result of fires, rapes, shootings, beatings and other acts of violence. Within this larger construct, each story is a further act of remembering.

'Clara', written soon after the mass rapes, relates the acts of political violence in a manner that is critical in at least two ways. First, it preserves in literary memory the horrific acts in themselves through the story of one person. A young executive's otherwise routine working life is suddenly visited by the spillover from Indonesia's worst political crisis in three decades. From a handphone wielding executive like any other, she is suddenly marked as a woman and Chinese-Indonesian. She is raped and brutalized. Second, 'Clara' tells the story of the silencing of the ethnic Chinese in all its complexity, thereby conveying the dehumanizing relationships that have emerged as a consequence. It is not a simple story of victimization.

The gaze of the unidentified narrator is telling in itself. Clara's story is put together in the voice of the uniformed narrator—probably a police officer—who goes through a distancing self-reflection in the process. The voice reveals complex

feelings: envy of her as a wealthy person, sexual attraction to her, and hatred of her because of her Chineseness: 'I felt I wanted to rape her too' (Ajidarma 1999: 78). The narrator's perspective is not isolated or unique, but reflective of the othering of Chinese-Indonesian women in sexualized terms as elaborated in Chapter 6. At the same time, the distancing reflects the bureaucratic character of the job that has shaped this person. This last is critical, for the New Order's silencing of the Chinese—at least its pragmatic if not its ideological dimensions—was founded on bureaucratic alienation in everyday life (Heryanto 1997b: 28–9, 1998b).

Ajidarma's works were popular in the era of oppositional movements because they did not shy away from difficult social realities. The author's ability to convey complexity in simple and lucid language nevertheless, must account for how quickly the average print run of his books—3,000 copies— sold out.[36] Reading 'Clara' makes the reader aware of both the brutality of the rape and the discriminatory relationship that Indonesian society has had with the ethnic Chinese who are integral to it. The story speaks to the dehumanization suffered by the whole society as a result of this discrimination, and not by its victims alone. Extrapolating from the story, progress may not be achieved by removing the structural or bureaucratic oppression alone. It will require creative efforts to remember the complexity of the political culture under authoritarian rule.

Activist art practices are not defined by statements purely antithetical to state power alone. They are aesthetically multidimensional and complex, thereby giving creative protests the capacity to be illuminating, instructive, memorable as well as sharply critical. Arts activism is thus positioned to engage society and politics as a whole, besides the state. When arts workers explore fully the creative potential of their media, aesthetic engagements can in ways unique to them deepen the imaginative and conceptual dimensions of oppositional politics.

Conclusion

Activist arts workers have carved out spaces within authoritarian regimes where freedom of expression and democratic politics have been explored, though not without threat of intimidation and sanction. Within these spaces, arts workers from a variety of social backgrounds and arts media have recast society from the bottom up. This is the most striking and loosely interconnected theme that emerges in the respective activist art worlds of Indonesia and Malaysia at the end of the 1990s. Working under rather different kinds of authoritarian rule and historical circumstances, activist arts workers in each country have come to rely on certain arts practices and traditions in common. Despite the distinctiveness of each country, then, there are areas of similar or related concerns. Challenging authoritarianism is one such area. Hence, the arrival in the two countries in 1999 of Dario Fo, the master political satirist who has developed laughing at the powerful into an illuminating art form.

Activist arts workers in Malaysia and Indonesia have asserted that the arts is for all and thereby transgresses established cultural and social boundaries. Put in Moelyono's words: 'Everyone has the potential to produce culture' (Moelyono 1998:207). Should a source of subversiveness in the arts be privileged, it would be this claim. The assertion that the arts is a space for egalitarianism and democratic politics lies at the heart of many of the social groups and aesthetic engagements that have been studied. This is a subversive suggestion for it prefigures the call for democratization in arenas of politics beyond arts workers and symbolic engagements. As a result, those who, like worker-poet Wiji Thukul, have come closest in aesthetic dialogues and social status to the dispossessed have been subjected to the worst of the state's wrath. Arts workers like him brought culture and politics together in ways much too threatening to the New Order.

Some activist arts efforts have been charted in this chapter that have developed the arts from below and as a result contested and eroded established norms and hierarchies. Where Jasper emphasizes the precedence of political education before the artwork, the two have grown together in the instances examined. In other words, arts workers have been democratizing the framing of the arts as well as producing aesthetic engagements that are democratic. Jasper's valuable theorizing may thus be modified to accommodate the growth of political education alongside aesthetic engagements.

Workers have notably advanced poetry in Indonesia that is speaking up against authoritarian rule from the very industrial sites that it established. This development has provided a forum for those in the lowest strata of society to express their creativity and imagination (Budianta 1999:xv), and to release intellectual exploration from the confines of institutional boundaries. Working class poets and arts workers resist and recast the elitist cultural and political complex that underpins authoritarian rule.

Given the efforts to recast society and politics from the bottom, arts workers lend their talents to oppositional movements in two principal ways: by cultivating pluralist discursive spaces and producing resonant symbols. The pluralism of activist arts spaces enables key issues such as nationhood to be rendered in their complexity and variety of interpretations. This and the social diversity of arts workers themselves—as workers, women, intellectuals, farmers, and so on—make the arts a platform that is amenable to cooperative efforts by a variety of oppositional social actors. The events 'Indonesia Acclaims' in Jakarta and the APA arts festival in Kuala Lumpur each anticipated a nation that is radically divergent from the official record. In each instance, arts workers cooperated with other social actors in the organization of the events. In the former, arts activists revitalized the Chinese-Indonesian *barongsai* performance that had been banned for three decades, while showcasing resistance arts from separatist regions. In the latter, a variety of art workers came together from different ethnic and social backgrounds to present an unfragmented Malaysian cultural identity.

At the same time arts activists lend their talents to the production of symbols whose importance in oppositional politics has been highlighted by both Simons

and Kester, the latter observes in addition that arts workers 'are skilled in the modulation of symbolic meaning' (Kester 1998:12). Symbols in this regard may anticipate, precede or accompany social change and political transition. Arts activism plays the role of rendering in physical space the symbolic manifestations of political and social change, such as the push for greater democratic space in the post-Suharto era.

Arts workers are perhaps the only social group well equipped with the resources for the symbolic repossession of the public space in this regard. The takeover of the streets by the concert in Yogyakarta described in this chapter is such an act, and in this instance, it was also a show of force to countervail threats of mob violence that were in the air. The city's control in symbolic and real terms remained in the hands of the thousands peacefully gathered at the rock concert that night.

The oft-heard references to arts workers as 'independent souls *[jiwa merdeka]*' may be based on a romantic notion of their place in society much like the idealization of journalists and intellectuals that is critiqued in Chapter 2. There is nevertheless something to be said about the positioning from the margins of activist arts workers as the basis of an independent and critical perspective. Arts workers often see themselves as ruled by the dictates of the market and state, and thus marginalized (Budianta and Gunadi 1998:39; Mohamad 1998: ix-xi). The position of arts workers on the margins of society under authoritarian rule may nevertheless allow an outsider's perspective, so to speak. Arts workers by their very definition and existence thus insist on cultural engagements with the larger political and economic order. They stand in sharp contrast to the tradition in high art that has been in the making by developing subversive alternatives such as encouraging creativity among the working classes and poor—an act of cultural empowerment. This is the re-assessment of 'the economy' called for by Sakamoto as a key step towards advancing democratic civil society.

The *Reformasi* years eroded established structures and resulted in the increased self-consciousness of arts groups of their own role and identity. A well-known Malaysian actor and theatre director believed he 'had very few rights' before he performed extracts from the country's constitution concerning freedom of speech at the APA arts festival. However, he became empowered after his creative foray (Gecker 1998). The most significant impact of the mobilization in Malaysia has been the foregrounding of political responsibility within the community of artists itself. On the Indonesian end, much like the women's activists analyzed in Chapter 6, pluralist experiments unbounded by rigid ideological constraints were allowed to grow. Despite the economic crisis, there were continued efforts to advance the arts from below.

As observed earlier, the basis of the subversion in speaking 'from the land of factories', to use the title of Wowok Hesti Prabowo's poems to Habibie and Mahathir respectively, is asserting that the arts is for everyone. Wowok takes it to mean all social classes, including workers at the bottom rungs of the social ladder. Jo Kukathas takes it to mean that the arts is open to all ethnic groups, grounding her Malaysian cultural identity in democratic politics and justice.

Through the forging of a subversive cultural identity created out of Malaysia's ethnic and religious diversity, and through the reconsideration of the meaning of nationhood in Indonesia—repositioning workers and other marginalized groups strongly—arts activists have engaged in issues critical to post-colonial societies. Unlike efforts to democratize through the electoral mechanism, arts activists have been democratizing society and culture by introducing a subversive politics of cultural identity and representing the voices on the margins.

Besides the adaptation of Fo, and indeed Freire, whose origins lie in Italy and Brazil respectively, the *Reformasi* era may have seen for the first time Indonesian and Malaysian arts activism inspiring and influencing one another. Broadly speaking, oppositional social and political movements in both countries provided mutual support. This chapter suggests, in addition, that the conjuncture in arts trajectories in fostering the arts of the working class and dispossessed, may indicate a shared perspective between the two countries. Instant Café Theatre's critique in song of Suharto and Wowok's poetic challenge to the two authoritarian leaders is an example of an oppositional cultural politics framed from below and located in the 'country of factories'—the industrial experience common to both nations.

It is helpful in closing to return to Kester's assertion that the activist aesthetic can indeed convey a subversive pleasure. The creativity of many of the arts workers studied in this chapter is driven by a commitment to political change. Agus Nur Amal is a notable example of an arts worker who has explored to its full potential a traditional Acehnese performance tradition that in turn embodies the young man's commitment to see the restoration of peace in the province. Creativity may nevertheless generate a politics as well. Wong Hoy Cheong for instance, notes in this chapter that 'the very act of creating art is an act of liberation'. Some of his art students develop a critical political awareness through the questioning generated by doing creative work. Goenawan Mohamad puts it differently. Art, he believes, may not have a visible impact at a particular moment in time. However, it 'contains the seed of future protest'.[37] Creativity, then, may engender protest and vice versa. This subject of great complexity may best be concluded tentatively by observing that protest and creativity are intimately connected. For certain, arts workers are subversive when they insist on the sheer worth of creativity. They become even more so by claiming it for all.

Notes

I would like to thank Barbara Hatley and Nora Taylor for their helpful criticisms and suggestions.

1 Valentine Willie Fine Art, a leading Kuala Lumpur gallery, exhibited the works of Wong Hoy Cheong, Simryn Gill and Hayati Mokhtar in 1998 under the title *Schools: Textual Works.* Of the three visual artists of Malaysian origin, Wong is the best known as an activist arts worker, locally and internationally, and is also represented

by the same gallery. See Mandal (1998a) for further details of the exhibition. Heri Dono is one of Indonesia's most well-known visual artists internationally. On 28 June 1999,1 viewed the exhibition of his works *Virtual Reality* held at the Dutch cultural centre, Erasmus Huis, Jakarta, 12 June-10 July 1999.

2 This claim appears in the map available in November 1998 at the Tourist Information Office run by the *Yayasan Pusat Kebudayaan* (Cultural Centre Foundation) in Bandung.

3 Eddin Khoo the poet, writer and journalist runs the organization *Pusaka* (Heritage) that is dedicated to the documentation and conservation of the traditional arts in Malaysia.

4 Unless otherwise stated, I base my observations of APA on my own research on the growth of the group since its initial meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 10 September 1998.

5 An overview of a range of activist art practices in the post-independence era may be found in Tan (1992).

6 The e-group may be found at http://www.egroups.com/group/artisproactiv/

7 The account that follows is based on my own attendance at the events in question.

8 These observations are based on my own research on the arts community in Malaysia in 1998.

9 A brief discussion of the history of resistance in the Indonesian arts is provided by Wright (1998:116–17).

10 Interview with Azet Hutabarat of *Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa,* Jakarta, 6 November 1998.

11 The discussion that follows is based on my own observations of the street concert in Yogyakarta on 26 June 1999.

12 The complete text is as follows: *'Jangan tambah penderitaan rakyat dengan membuat kerusuhan di wilayah kami, Warga Masyarakat D.I.Yogyakarta'.* Indonesian/Malay distinguishes two non-interchangeable pronouns that translate equally well in English as 'we'. The word *kita* includes the addressee(s), *kami* excludes them. Note that 'our district' here means *'wilayah kami'* and not *'kita',* underscoring opposition to the dominant claims and assumptions that the widespread violence in the country consisted of conflicts between locals of different ethnic or religious groups. The banner is a message that overtly addresses 'outsiders' (read provocateurs sent from Jakarta).

13 Unless otherwise stated, the following observations are based on my attendance at the play at a few different times during its two-week run.

14 It is noteworthy that in 1996 Instant Café Theatre lent their performance space to a week long series of events to raise funds for the creation of a human rights foundation in the name of Kamal Bamadhaj, the Malaysian activist who was killed by Indonesian troops in the Dili massacre of 12 November 1991.

15 Interview with Goenawan Mohamad, Jakarta 6 November 1998.

16 This is the rather bulky translation that is in formal use for *Institut Studi Arus Informasi* (ISAI).

17 Interview with members of Sanggar Suwung, Yogyakarta, 27 June 1999.

18 Members of Sanggar Suwung maintained that the much-touted *Festival Kesenian Yogyakarta (FKY) XI—1999* (the Yogyakarta Arts Festival XI) held on 7–20 June and 24 June-7 July 1999 seemed geared towards promoting tourism rather than the arts. I attended the large exhibition as well as the arts and crafts fair that was advertised by musicians travelling on the back of a lorry, multicoloured buntings,

posters and so forth, as a major tourist attraction. I nevertheless learned from my interview in Yogyakarta on 27 June 1999 with Alex Luthfi, a visual artist and teacher at *Institut Seni Indonesia* (Institute of Indonesian Arts), who was involved in the arts festival, that he and other artists were championing activist art practices.

19 This refers to a modern performer of Acehnese traditional epic *hikayat.* It takes the form of monologues in verse with religious, comic or other themes. I am grateful to Teuku Afrizal and one of the anonymous reviewers of this book manuscript for this background information.

20 I watched Agus Nur Amal perform at the launch of *Derabat,* a collection of the best short stories for 1999, at the headquarters of *Kompas,* the leading Indonesian daily, in Jakarta on 28 June 1999. The audience included members of Jakarta's social and cultural elite as well as students, journalists, and arts workers.

21 Agus was listed to perform *Hikayat Tentara Nyesel Jadi Tentara* (The Story of the Military Regretting Being the Military) at the *Festival Teater Hak Asasi Manusia* (Human Rights Theatre Festival) held at his Institute's theatre space at the end of 1998 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

22 This is my own translation of the original fragment:

> Sebagai Kuda aku boleh meringkik tak boleh bicara
> Sepanjang hari kutanam patuh di setiap sudut hati
> aku pasrab ketika tiba-tiba mesin itu tlah menjelma tembok
> tak berpintu tak berjendela. aku terkurung olehnya'
>
> (Roda Roda Budaya 1998: 34)

23 In the middle of 1999, I inquired about Wiji Thukul in Jakarta and sought him in Yogyakarta where he was meant to be in hiding. I was neither able to find him nor learn more about his whereabouts.

24 Unless otherwise stated, the following account is based on my interview with Wong Hoy Cheong, Kuala Lumpur, 21 August 1999.

25 I attended a performance by The People Band at the variety show 'Stand Up and Be Counted' held on 12 December 1998 at Saint Francis Xavier Church, Petaling Jaya to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

26 On 13 April 1999, the night before the judgement in the case of Anwar was to be passed, the film maker and one-time student activist Hishammudin Rais helped to initiate the poetry reading advertised as 'A Gay Reunion', organized by Youth for Alternative Government (YUFAG). Plans for the gathering to be held at *Dataran Merdeka* (Independence Square)—the site of numerous *Reformasi* protests—were scuttled. After being chased by police through the streets of Kuala Lumpur's old town, the poetry reading was moved to the square outside the National Mosque.

27 Interview with Alex Luthfi, Yogyakarta, 27 June 1999.

28 Interview with Putu Wijaya, Kuala Lumpur, 22 May 1999.

29 This work was exhibited at the visual arts exhibition that was part of the APA arts festival. Literally the title says 'From Coast to Coast' but its implicit meaning is 'From Malaysia to Indonesia'.

30 The following account is based on my attendance at the performance of *Marsinah Menggugat II* in Jakarta on 23 October 1998 in conjunction with the Human Rights Theatre Festival (see note 21).
31 Interview with Ratna Sarumpaet, Jakarta, 29 June 1999.
32 Interview with Shahnon Ahmad, Bangi, 9 June 1999.
33 I was present at the public lecture held at the main auditorium of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia on 9 June 1999 and asked Shahnon why negative inferences to the protagonist's ethnic background are made in the novel when ethnic divisions are not primary in the Islamic religion that the author professes. His reply appeared to avoid my implicit suggestion of the novel's ethnicism. He observed that it is not the protagonist's ethnic but political origins that the novel touches on. The author's strong and principled moral opposition—based on his religious convictions—to the ruling regime and its developmentalism does not necessarily translate to a pluralist perspective on the nation's multi-ethnic society.
34 The announcement faxed by *Jabatan Persuratan Melayu* (the Department of Malay Letters) on 3 June 1999 to the different divisions of *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* (National University of Malaysia) said that Shahnon's visit was part of its seminar series and stated the topic as *'Bersama Pengarang: Proses Penghasilan Karya* [Meet the Author: The Process of Creative Production]'.
35 Interview with Shahnon Ahmad, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia, 9 June 1999.
36 Interview with Seno Gumira Ajidarma, Jakarta, 30 June 1999. Given the poor sales of literary works, this figure is a strong indication of the author's popularity (Budianta and Gunadi 1998:37–8).
37 Interview with Goenawan Mohamad. Jakarta. 6 November 1998.

Appendix I

Kulihat Ibu Pertiwi

Kulihat Ibu Pertiwi
Sedang bersusah hati
Airmatanya berlinang
Mas intannya terkenang

Hutan gunung sawah lautan
Simpanan kekayaan
Kini ibu sedang lara
Merintih dan berdoa

I Saw Our Motherland

I saw Our Motherland
Rapt in sadness
Her eyes filled with tears
Remembering her lost treasures

Forests, mountains, ricefields, oceans
Her reserves of wealth
Now Mother is sorrowful
Crying softly and praying

(Author unknown, translated by Melani Budianta and Sumit K.Mandal)

Appendix II

Doa Perempuan Antar Iman

Sesungguhnya laki-laki dan perempuan yang menunduk
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang berserah diri
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang taat
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang benar
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang sabar
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang khusyuk
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang bersedekah
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang puasa (menahan diri)
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang memelihara kehormatan
Laki-laki dan perempuan yang banyak mengingat Allah
Untuk mereka Allah menyediakan ampunan dan anugerah pahala yang besar
(al-Qur'an, Surah al-Ahzab, 33:35)

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Hawa,
Limpahkanlah kepada kami kaum perempuan di negeri ini
Kekuatan dan ketabahan Hawa
Untuk melahirkan peradaban manusia yang beradab,
Melalui penderitaannya beranak pinak

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Hajar dan Sarah
Berilah kami para perempuan di negeri ini
Keteguhan mereka berdua
Hingga sanggup meneguhkan Nabi Ibrahim
Memanggul amanat memimpin umat
Membawa ke jalan selamat

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Asiah istri Firaun
Berilah kaum perempuan di negeri ini
Keteguhan iman Asiah untuk melawan kezaliman
Meski yang ia lawan suaminya sendiri

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Masyithah pelayan Firaun
Berilah kami para perempuan di negeri ini
Keteguhan iman Masyithah
Tatkala ia melawan raja penghulu negerinya
Yang lalim tamak dan mempertuhankan diri
Dan menghukwn Masyithah dengan timah cair yang membara

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Balqis dari negeri Saba
Berilah kami para perempuan di negeri ini
Kesanggupan untuk memimpin seperti Balqis
Yang telah mengubah padang tandus menjadi tanah subur
Dan membawa rakyatnya keluar dari bencana kelaparan

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Yasodara istri Sidharta
Berilah kami perempuan di negeri ini
Ketulusan hati Sri Ratu
Yang merelakan suaminya memilih jalan cahaya
Meninggalkan dirinya serta tahta kerajaan

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Mariam bunda Isa Almasih
Berilah kami kaum perempuan di negeri ini
Kesucian hati Mariam
Hingga sanggup menangkap wahyu-Mu
Untuk melahirkan anak yang mengajarkan kasih dan perdamaian
Tidakkah kini wahyu-wahyu-Mu
Lebih sering diujarkan untuk mendukung kekuasaan
Ketimbang menyerukan keadilan dan kebenaran

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Khadijah istri Muhammad
Berilah kami kaum perempuan di negeri ini
Kepandaian mencari rizki seperti Khadijah
Dan dengan rizki itu

Rasullulah menyerukan dakwaknya

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Aisyah Ummul Mu'minin
Berilah kami perempuan di negeri ini
Kecerdasan Aisyah
Yang dengan kecerdasannya itu
Ia maknai kehadiran-Mu
Melalui catatan perilaku dan teladan Rasul
Betapa sungguh Nabi berwasiat
Agar mengangkat derajat dan menaruh hormat pada kaum perempuan

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Fatimah putri Muhammad
Berilah kami perempuan di negeri ini
Kelurusan dan kesalehan hati Fatimah
Meski ia putri terkasih Rasul dan istri seorang Khalifah
Namun ia biarkan tangannya berdarah
Ketika ia mengorek sebutir gandum
Dari mulut mungil anaknya yang belum lagi mengerti
Gandum itu bukan milik orang tuanya
Melainkan milik umat, milik rakyat
Yang ada di bawah amanah bapaknya

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Bunda Theresia dari Calcutta
Berilah kami perempuan di negeri ini
Kekuatan dan keteguhan Bunda Theresia
Agar sanggup menyapa kaum papa
Yang tak lagi dianggap sebagai manusia oleh sesama

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan Marsinah
Berilah kami kaum perempuan di negeri ini
Keberanian yang diajarkan Marsinah
Untuk membela hak kaumnya sebagai pekerja
Meski nyawa yang menjadi taruhannya

Ya Allah yang telah menciptakan berjuta perempuan lainnya
Berilah kami para perempuan di negeri ini
Ketauladanan mereka
Untuk melanjutkan
Apa yang mereka perjuangkan

Akan tetapi ya Rabbi
Masih pantaskah kami
Memohon tambahan ketabahan
Bagi berjuta perempuan yang berada di batas pengharapan
Antara sakit dan derita
Antara hidup dan kematian
Akibat kesewenang-wenangan
Masih pantaskah kami memohon lagi kesabaran
Ketika kezaliman dianggap sebagai kelaziman
Ketika kehendak untuk berkuasa
Mengalahkan nurani dan akal budi
Ketika menyuarakan keadilan
Dianggap sebagai pembangkangan

Ya Allah, dengarkanlah pinta kami malam ini
(Bimbinglah kami ke jalan yang lurus
Jalannya orang-orang yang Engkau beri petunjuk
Bukan jalannya orang-orang yang Engkau murkai
Dan bukan pula Jalan orang yang sesat)
Amin.

Lies Mustafsira Marcoes-Natsir,
Jakarta. 8 Maret 1998

The Women's Interfaith Prayer

Truly it is men and women who bow down,
men and women who are obedient,
men and women who are faithful,
men and women who are patient,
men and women who are pious,
men and women who are full of charity,
men and women who fast (show chastity),
men and women who respect dignity,
men and women who always remember God,
to them God gives His mercy and His everlasting Grace. *(al-Qur'an, Surah al-Ahzab, 33:35)*

O God, who created Eve,
grant us, the women of this country

Eve's stoical strength
to give birth to humane civilization
through her suffering in childbirth.

O God, who created Hagar and Sarah,
grant us, the women of this country
their perseverance,
with which they could strengthen Abraham's spirit
to lead his people
upon the road of salvation.

O God, who created Asiah, the Pharaoh's wife,
grant us, the women of this country
Asiah's strength to fight tyranny,
even when the enemy she fought was her own husband.

O God, who created Masyithah, the Pharaoh's servant,
grant us, the women of this country
Masyithah's faith,
when she had to fight the King of her country,
who was greedy and who idolized himself,
and punished Masyithah with burning molten tin.

O God, who created Balqis from the country of Saba,
grant us, the women of this country
Balqis' ability to lead,
with which she changed the barren earth into fertile land
to lead her people out of starvation.

O God, who created Yasodara, Sidharta's wife,
grant us, the women of this country
the Queen's generosity
in letting her husband choose the path of light
leaving her and the throne.

O God, who created Mary the Mother of Jesus,
grant us, the women of this country
Mary's holiness

to accept your decree
to give birth to a child who teaches love and peace.
Have not your decrees
now been used to support power
rather than to speak for justice and truth?

O God, who created Khadijah, Muhammad's wife,
grant us, the women of this country
Khadijah's business ability
so that with all the wealth
the Prophet could spread his teachings.

O God, who created Aisyah Ummul Mu'minin,
grant us, the women of this country
Aisyah's intelligence
in giving meaning to Your presence
from her notes on the Prophet's exemplary life.
How truly the Prophet taught us to
empower and respect women.

O God, who created Fatimah, Muhammad's daughter,
grant us, the women of this country
Fatimah's integrity and piety.
Although she was the Prophet's most beloved daughter and
the wife of a Khalifah,
she let her hand bleed
in taking out one grain of wheat
out of the small mouth of her unknowing child,
who did not yet understand, that the wheat
did not belong to her parents but to the people,
that it belonged to the people his father governed.

O God, who created Mother Theresa of Calcutta,
grant us, the women of this country
Mother Theresa's strength and perseverance
so that we could warmly greet the poor
who are not treated as human beings by their neighbors,

O God, who created Marsinah
grant us, the women of this country
the courage shown by Marsinah
defending the rights of women workers,

although she had to pay with her own life.

O God, who created millions of other women,
grant us, the women of this country
their exemplary behavior
in order to continue
what they have struggled for.

But, O Divine Teacher,
are we worthy still
to ask for more courage
for millions of women on the brink of despair
torn between suffering and pain
between life and death
because of all of the violent abuses?
Are we worthy still to ask for more patience
while cruelty is treated as normalcy,
while the will to power,
overcomes conscience and common sense,
while voicing justice
is considered treachery?

O, God, listen to our prayers tonight
(Lead us through the straight path
the paths of those you have enlightened,
not the path of those you condemned,
not the paths of those in the wrong),
Amen.

Lies Mustafsira Marcoes-Natsir,
Jakarta, 8 March 1998
(translated by Melani Budianta)

Glossary

ABIM *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia).
ahimsa non-violence.
AJI *Aliansi Jurnalis Independen* (Alliance of Independent Journalists).
APA Artis Pro Activ (Grouping of the arts community in Malaysia).
APEC Asia Pacific Economic Co-Operation forum.
ASAS 50 *Angkatan Sasterawan 1950* (Writers' Front of 1950).
ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations.
AWAM All Women's Action Society.
Bakorstanas *Badan Koordinasi Strategis Nasional* (National Strategic Coordinating Body).
Barisan Nasional National Front (the ruling coalition of political parties in Malaysia).
CUEPACS Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services.
dakwah missionary activity (in Islamic traditions).
Darma Wanita Women's Duty (association of Indonesian civil servants' wives).
Darul Arqam House of Arqam (a communitarian Islamic movement in Malaysia, banned in 1994).
Dasar National Culture Policy.
Kebudayaan
Kebangsaan
fatwa learned opinion (in Islamic traditions).
FBSI *Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia* (All-Indonesia Labour Federation).
FSPSI Federasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia (All-Indonesia Federation of Workers' Unions).
Gasbiindo *Gabungan Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia* (Amalgamated Islamic Trade Unions of Indonesia).
Gaspermindo *Gabungan Serikat Pekerja Merdeka Indonesia* (Amalgamated Independent Indonesian Trade Unions).
Gema Madani Echo of Civil Society.
Gerwani *Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* (Indonesian Women's Movement).
hadith sayings and practices attributed to the Prophet Muhammad.
HAKAM *Persatuan Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia* (Human Rights Society of Malaysia).
hudud punishment prescribed by God (in Islamic traditions).
ISA Internal Security Act.
Jaker *Jaringan Kerja Kesenian Rakyat* (Network for People's Art).
JAKIM *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (Department of Islamic Development, Malaysia).
JEBAK *Jaringan Buruh Antar Kota* (Inter-city Workers Network).
Jurnal Jakarta-based women's journal.
Perempuan

KABI *Kesatuan Aksi Buruh Indonesia* (Indonesian Workers Action Front).
Kalyanamitra Advocacy and Information Centre for Women.
KIPP *Komite Independen Pengawas Pemilu* (Independent Committee for Monitoring the Elections).
KOBAR *Komite Buruh untuk Aksi Reformasi* (Workers' Committee for Reform Action).
Komnas *Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan*
Perempuan (National Commission on Violence Against Women).
Kopkamtib *Komando Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban* (Command for the Restoration of Security and Order).
KOWANI *Kongres Wanita Indonesia* (Indonesian Women's Congress).
KPIKD *Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan dan Demokrasi* (Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy).
MADIA *Masyarakat Dialog Antar Agama* (Society for Interfaith Dialogue).
MPI *Masyarakat Profesional Indonesia* (Society of Indonesian Professionals).
MTUC Malaysian Trade Union Council.
mufti Islamic religious official.
MUI *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Council of Indonesian Ulama).
NGO Non-Govemmental Organization.
Parti Keadilan National Justice Party.
Nasional
Parti Rakyat People's Party of Malaysia.
Malaysia
PAS *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* (All-Malaysia Islamic Party).
PDIP *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle).
Perbupas *Persatuan Buruh Pabrik Sepatu* (Shoe Factory Workers' Union).
Perikatan Federation of Indonesian Women's Organizations.
Perkumpulan
Perempuan
Indonesia
PKI *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party).
PKK *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (Family Welfare Guidance).
PPBI *Pusat Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia* (Centre for Indonesian Working Class Struggles).
PPMI *Persaudaraan Pekerja Muslim Indonesia* (Indonesian Muslim Solidarity Trade Union).
PRD *Partai Rakyat Demokratik* (People's Democratic Party).
PST *Partai Sosialis Timor* (Socialist Party of Timor).
PWBI *Partai Warga Bangsa Indonesia* (Citizens of the Indonesian Nation Party).
SBSI *Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia* (Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union).
SERUNI *Seruan Perempuan Indonesia* (Voice of Indonesian Women).
shari'a Islamic law.
SIP *Suara Ibu Peduli* (Voice of Concerned Mothers).
SIS Sisters in Islam (officially known as SIS Forum Malaysia).
Sisbikum *Saluran Informasi dan Bimbingan Hukum* (Channel for Information and Legal Assistance).

SOBSI *Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia* (All-Indonesia Central Workers' Organization).
SNB *Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa* (Solidarity for the Land and Nation, an Indonesian NGO).
SPSI *Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia* (All-Indonesia Workers' Union).
SUARAM *Suara Rakyat Malaysia* (Voice of the Malaysian People).
sunnah the example set by the Prophet Muhammad.
SWCU Satya Wacana Christian University *(Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana)*.
TENAGANITA *Tenaga Wanita* (Women's Force), a Malaysian advocacy NGO for women workers.
TRK *Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan* (Volunteers for Humanity).
TRKP *Tim Relawan Divisi Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan* (Violence Against Women Division of the Volunteers for Humanity).
ulama Islamic scholar.
ummah community (in Islamic traditions).
UMNO United Malays National Organization.
UPC Urban Poor Consortium *(Konsorsium Kemiskinan Kota)*.
WCI Women's Candidacy Initiative.

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